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ACCHE DIN FOR MIDDLE CLASS?

No tax on income up to Rs 12L; 36 drugs exempted from duties; Opposition says sops only for Bihar

PLANS • ALLOCATIONS • EXPENDITURES
UNION BUDGET 2025

TOTAL BUDGET EXPENDITURE	CAPITAL EXPENDITURE	NOMINAL GDP	FISCAL DEFICIT
Rs 50.65 lakh crore (RS 48,20,512 CRORE IN 2024)	Rs 11.21 L cr	10.1% FOR FY26	4.8% FOR FY26

Rs 1.5 lakh crore
OUTLAY FOR INTEREST FREE LOAN TO STATES FOR INFRA DVPT

Finance Minister **Nirmala Sitharaman** on Saturday made history as she presented a record eighth consecutive Budget

> Yuva, Annadata, and Nari Shakti. Reforms across six domains - taxation, power sector, urban development, mining, financial sector and regulatory reforms.
> —Nirmala Sitharaman

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in her Union Budget announcement, unveiled income tax cuts aimed at benefiting the middle class. The exemption threshold for individuals earning up to Rs 12 lakh annually has been raised from Rs 7 lakh, ensuring that 1 crore people will no longer pay taxes. The revamped tax slab will benefit 6.3 crore taxpayers, over 80 per cent of the total.

Meanwhile, Opposition MPs staged a brief walkout from the Lok Sabha during Sitharaman's Budget speech, demanding a statement from the government on the Kumbh stampede.

The 2025-26 Budget also proposes raising the foreign investment cap in the insurance sector. The focus is on boosting consumption and investment to support domestic economic growth amidst global uncertainties. The budget maintains its emphasis on infrastructure and extends increased support to the MSME and agricultural sectors. To manage the fiscal deficit, the government has planned a modest rise in capital spending to Rs 11.21 lakh crore for the next fiscal, up from Rs 10.18 lakh crore. Increased dividends from the RBI and other public financial institutions will help offset revenue losses.

The backdrop of this budget includes a slowing economy, with GDP growth expected at 6.4 per cent for the current fiscal and projected to be between 6.3 per cent and 6.8 per cent in the next. This growth is below the 8 per cent required to achieve India's goal of becoming a developed nation by 2047. Sitharaman projected national debt at 50 per cent of GDP by 2031. Key announcements include a social security cover for 1 crore gig workers, a Rs 10,000 crore fund for startups, and a target of 100 gigawatts of nuclear electricity by 2047. The tax on remittances under the Liberalised Remittance Scheme will rise from Rs 7 lakh to Rs 10 lakh, benefitting the travel and foreign exchange sectors.

Sitharaman made a slew of announcements for Bihar triggering strong reactions from Opposition parties that claimed that these proposals were made with an eye on the Assembly polls and called the Budget disappointing. They said states ruled by parties which were not part of the ruling NDA got nothing beneficial. —*PTI*

>>>More on Pages, 2, 3, 4 & 7

HIGHLIGHTS »

- No income tax for income up to Rs 12 lakh.
- Govt to extend time limit for filing updated returns to 4 years.
- No import duties on 36 drugs for rare diseases, 25 critical minerals.
- Gig works to get healthcare. Govt will arrange for ID cards & registration of gig workers on e-Shram portal.
- Prime Minister Dhan-Dhaanya Krishi Yojana to cover 100 districts and to benefit 1.7 crore farmers.
- Kisan credit card loan for 7.7 crore farmers will be increased from Rs 3L to Rs 5L.
- Govt schools to get internet broadband.
- 10,000 seats to be added in medical colleges next year. 75,000 seats in the next 5 years.
- Rs 20,000 crore nuclear mission.
- TDS threshold on rent increased to Rs 6L and Rs 1L for senior citizens.
- Daycare cancer centres in all district hospitals in next 3 years.
- UDAN scheme to connect 120 new destinations .
- Rs 15,000 crore 'SWAMIH Fund' for completion of 1 lakh units in stalled housing projects.
- Sports budget raised by over Rs 350 crore, Khelo India gets biggest share.
- Rs 2.52 lakh cr allocated to Railways, nod to manufacturing 200 Vande Bharat trains.

WHAT IS CHEAPER?
- LED/LCD TVs
- Lithium-ion battery
- Leather belts, shoes, jackets
- Frozen fish and Fish paste (Surimi) - Customs duty down from 30% to 5%
- Marine products
- Synthetic flavouring essences
- Raw materials for manufacturing ships
- Cobalt products
- Carrier grade internet switches
- Bikes with engine capacity of 1600 CC

WHAT'S COSTLIER?
- Interactive flat panel display
- Knitted fabrics
- Smart meter
- Solar cells
- Imported footwear
- Imported candles and tapers
- Imported yachts and other vessels
- PVC flex films, PVC Flex sheets, PVC Flex Banner

Sector with highest and lowest allocations:
1. Defence: Rs 6,81,210 crore
2. Scientific development: Rs 55,679 crore

Sensex, Nifty end flat on Budget day

MUMBAI, 1 FEB

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended flat in a special trading session on Saturday, as little came in from Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for retail investors and the overall markets in the Union Budget.

However, buying in consumption-related sectors after Sitharaman exempted annual income of up to Rs 12 lakh from income tax and rejigged tax slabs as part of her reformist Budget prevented any major fall in the markets.

The markets were open on Saturday because of the presentation of the Union Budget. Earlier, markets were open on Saturdays when the Budgets were presented on 1 February, 2020 and 28 February, 2015.

In a day market with heavy volatility, the 30-share BSE benchmark Sensex eked out a marginal gain of 5.39 points or 0.01 per cent to settle at 77,505.96. During the day, it hit a high of 77,899.05 and a low of 77,006.47, gyrating 892.58 points. The NSE Nifty dipped 26.25 points or 0.11 per cent to settle at 23,482.15. Intra-day, the benchmark scaled a high of 23,632.45 and a low of 23,318.30. The BSE midcap gauge declined 0.49 per cent while smallcap index climbed 0.28 per cent. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 7

CM says K'taka got *'khaali chombu'*

MYSURU, 1 FEB

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday slammed the union budget, saying it had given the state a 'khaali chombu' (empty vessel).

WHAT DID K'TAKA GET?
Rs 500 crore for Centre of Excellence in AI for education to be set up in B'luru

Even though the Karnataka was second highest tax paying state in the country, union government overlooked, has continued its injustice to the state as it has given more focus for Bihar due to assembly polls, its NDA partner state Andhra Pradesh by releasing highest number of grants for these two states.

Siddaramaiah said he had sent several requests to the Centre to be included in this budget, but they were not considered.

"Our projects like the Mekedatu balancing reservoir across the Cauvery in Kanakapura, the Upper Bhadra water project, the Mahadayi river, and Krishna river irrigation projects were not given any consideration. We had high expectations from the budget, but it could not live up to them," he said.

"In Bengaluru, we had requested funds for stormwater drains and business corridors, but what we got is 'khaali chombu'. In all, this budget gives Karnataka 'chombu'," he added.

The CM said Bihar and AP received the lion's share. "There is a coalition government at the Centre. For political reasons, special grants have been given to Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. Last year and this year as well, they were given a package. In a way, this budget gives more emphasis to Bihar and AP," he said, but added that he had not read the entire budget and could not listen to Sitharaman's full budget speech. —*PTI*

>>>More on Page 2

BIHAR BUDGET

The Centre rolled out a slew of measures for Bihar, which heads to polls later this year. Here are the major announcements:

- State to get Makhana Board.
- To get a greenfield airport. Brownfield airport at Bihta to be developed.
- Financial support for Western Koshi Canal Project in Mithilanchal.
- Establishment of National Institute of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship and Management.
- Expansion of hostel and other infra to accommodate 6,500 more students at IIT Patna.

> This is the budget of aspirations of 140 crore Indians. This is a budget that fulfils the dreams of every Indian. This budget is a force multiplier. This budget will increase savings, investment, consumption and growth rapidly
> Narendra Modi, Prime Minister

> This is a far cry from the 8-per cent growth rate that the CEA estimated in order to become a developed country. In our view, this is a government with no new ideas and no will to reach beyond its grasp
> P Chidambaram, Ex-finance minister

Maggots found in meals at Yadgir hostel

YADGIR, 31 JAN

A disturbing incident has emerged from the boys' hostel in Hunasagi, Yadgir district, where students discovered maggots in both their lunch and dinner. Frustrated residents reported consistently poor and unhygienic food quality, with larvae and worms appearing in their meals. Despite notifying the kitchen staff, no substantial action was taken. Part of the D Devaraj Urs Backward Classes Welfare Scheme, the hostel is reportedly in a state of neglect, prompting local citizens to call for immediate government intervention. Students have also raised grave concerns over kitchen staff allegedly taking leftover food home at night. While the facility is intended for 102 students, only 45 are officially registered. ***—Salar News***

Eight AAP MLAs join BJP in presence of Delhi BJP Chief Virender Sachdeva, in New Delhi on Saturday ***PHOTO: PTI***

8 AAP MLAs join BJP ahead of Delhi polls

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Eight MLAs who resigned from AAP on Friday joined the BJP on Saturday, just four days ahead of the Delhi Assembly polls.

The MLAs who joined the BJP are Vandana Gaur (Palam), Rohit Mehraulia (Trilokpuri), Girish Soni (Madipur), Madan Lal (Kasturba Nagar), Rajesh Rishi (Uttam Nagar), B S Joon (Bijwasan), Naresh Yadav (Mehrauli) and Pawan Sharma (Adarsh Nagar). All eight legislators had been denied poll tickets by AAP this time.

The eight members had resigned after claiming that AAP deviated from its ideology and cited corruption in the ranks. After resigning, they said they sent their resignation letters to the Assembly speaker, relinquishing their membership of the House.

Earlier, former AAP MLA Vijender Garg and several other leaders of the Kejriwal-led party too joined the saffron outfit in the presence of Baijayant Panda, its national vice-president and the in-charge of the Delhi BJP, and state president Virendra Sachdeva.

Welcoming the MLAs and leaders to the BJP, Panda said it is a "historic" day as they have gotten rid of "AAPda" (disaster) and hoped that after the 5 February polls, Delhi too will be freed from it.

The 70-member Delhi Assembly is scheduled to go to polls on 5 February. —*PTI*

WINDS OF CHANGE

Karnataka 'Naxal free' with last surrender on 1 Feb: Police

CHIKKAMAGALURU / BIJAPUR, 1 FEB

Another Naxalite surrendered before the police in Chikkamagaluru district on Saturday, marking a significant step towards the State becoming naxal-free.

"With this surrender, Karnataka is now Naxal-free," Chikkamagaluru Superintendent of Police (SP) Vikram Amathe told PTI.

Kotehonda Ravindra, 44, a resident of Kotehonda in Hulagaru Bail near Kigga, Sringeri Taluk, has been living in the forests. On Friday, he arrived from Sringeri and surrendered before SP Amathe.

He was then taken to Deputy Commissioner Meena Nagaraj, where the formal surrender process was completed. Amathe said, "Ravindra is classified as an 'A' category Naxal as per the new Surrender Policy that came into effect on March 14, 2024. Under the surrender package, he will receive Rs 7.5 lakh from the government. If he wants to, he will be provided skill training as well and will be given a monthly package of Rs 5,000." According to police, a total of 27 cases are registered against Ravindra, including the 13 cases in Chikkamagaluru. Amathe also said so far, 21 Naxals have surrendered in Karnataka. Ravindra was involved in Naxal activities in Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu and had remained underground.

8 NAXALS GUNNED DOWN IN CHHATTISGARH

Eight Naxalites were killed in an encounter with security forces in Chhattisgarh's Bijapur district on Saturday, a senior police official said.

An Insas rifle and a barrel grenade launcher (BGL) were among the weapons recovered from the encounter site, he informed. Bijapur district on Saturday, a senior police official said. Gunfight broke out around 8.30am in the forest in Gangaloor police station area when District Reserve Guard and Special Task Force of the state police along with Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Commando Battalion for Resolute Action (CoBRA) were out on an anti-Naxalite operation, Inspector General of Police, Bastar Range, Sundarraj P said.

The operation was launched on Friday after receiving information about the presence of cadres of the West Bastar division of the outlawed Communist Party of India (Maoists) in the area, he said. —*PTI*

MLA BR PATIL QUITS AS K'TAKA CM's ADVISOR

KALABURAGI, 1 FEB

BR Patil, the MLA for Aland constituency and Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's Advisor, has resigned from his position today. Patil, who has held the advisory role for the past year, previously expressed discontent with the state Congress, voicing his frustrations in a letter to the Chief Minister.

The exact reasons for Patil's resignation remain unclear. Known as a long-time associate of Siddaramaiah, he had aspirations to secure a ministerial post, but faced obstacles from fellow Kalaburagi district leaders Priyank Kharge and Sharanprakash Patil. As a compromise, he was given the Advisory role rather than a ministerial position.

Patil has been openly critical of the government, echoing sentiments expressed by fellow Congress leader Basavaraj Rayareddy, who has also made controversial remarks. In response to internal dissent, CM Siddaramaiah appointed Rayareddy as the Financial Advisor in a bid to placate both leaders. —*Salar News*

BJP hails 'visionary' Budget; Oppn disappointed

BJP leaders say budget provides relief to middle class & farmers; Opposition terms it 'Modinomics'

BENGALURU, 1 FEB

BJP in Karnataka on Saturday hailed the union budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, calling it visionary and development-oriented.

Party leaders said the budget provides relief to the middle class as well as the agriculture sector.

"I extend my heartfelt congratulations to the Hon'ble Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi ji and Finance Minister Smt Nirmala Sitharaman for presenting a visionary budget that marks another milestone in the journey towards a developed India," former Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa said in a post on 'X'.

According to him, the budget for 2025-26 will be instrumental in empowering farmers, the middle class, and small and medium enterprises.

Meanwhile, Karnataka Minister Priyank Kharge has expressed disappointment with the Central government's economic policies, terming them as 'Modinomics'.

BJP MP and former Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai also hailed the budget, calling it a major push towards Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) and Viksit Bharat (Developed India) by 2047.

"It is a very inclusive budget that benefits farmers, youth, women, and SC/ST communities," he added.

"It is a boon to the middle class. By exempting income up to Rs 12 lakh from taxes, the budget will boost savings and investments.Many expected the tax exemption limit to be Rs 10 lakh, but this surprise move by PM Modi and FM Nirmala Sitharaman is a gift to the middle class," Bommai noted.

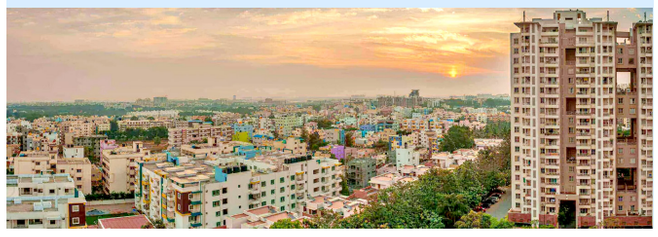
Union Budget has completely failed to meet the demands of farmers and is disappointing, said Minister for Forests, Zoology, and Environment, Eshwar Khandre.

"The current condition of farmers is uncertain. While all commodities have an MSP (Minimum Support Price), this budget has failed to introduce an MSP law ensuring a fixed price for farmers' hard-earned produce," he remarked.

—PTI/ Salar News

A game changer for B'luru property market: Experts

Even as the IT hub, which dominated the Indian commercial office market space in 2024, is expected to continue the trend in 2025, real estate and co-working experts in Bengaluru feel that the Union Budget 2025 will be a "game changer" for the industry as a whole. Sterling Developers CMD Ramani Sastri said the government's concentrated efforts on infrastructure development promise to significantly enhance housing demand. "It will also benefit around 250 ancillary industries, generating numerous job opportunities and bolstering overall economic growth," he added. Manas Mehrotra, Founder of 315Work Avenue, a coworking firm, said that the union budget 2025–26's focus on making cities growth hubs will impart a massive fillip to the commercial real estate sector. *—PTI*



Middle-class cheers, some say 'dil maange more'

BENGALURU, 1 FEB

In a welcome relief for the middle class, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman revealed in the Union Budget 2025-26 that individuals earning up to Rs 12 lakh annually will now be exempt from income tax under the new tax regime. This increase from the previous threshold of Rs 7 lakh aims to enhance disposable income amidst concerns over declining consumption and slowing GDP growth.

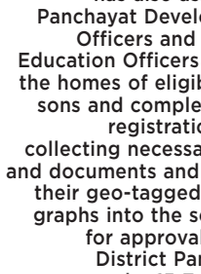
The announcement has received a warm response from young professionals. Shilpa Sharma, a 25-year-old marketing executive in Bengaluru, remarked, "This is a great step for youngsters like me who have just started their careers. I can save more at an early stage."

In addition, the budget raised the standard deduction for salaried individuals from Rs 50,000 to Rs 75,000, further alleviating taxable earnings. Experts believe these measures could stimulate private investments, bolster consumption, and create new jobs.

While many celebrated this "big relief" on social media, some argued for further reforms. Vishnu Sharma, a private sector employee, expressed, "For the first time, the middle class gets some respite, but there's still a gap between taxes paid and the facilities we receive."

As the government aims for economic growth, questions linger over whether this tax relief will effectively revive demand and address middle-class expectations. *—Salar News*

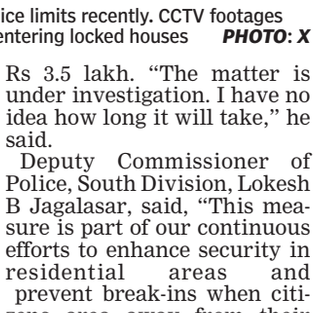
> **We pay high taxes but get little in return. Saving has become difficult, and my children's education costs Rs 3.5 lakh annually. The governments instead of making huge promises, must improve facilities, education and appoint teachers at the government schools to cut the rising cost of education in Bengaluru.**
>
> -Sunita Kumari, Government employee



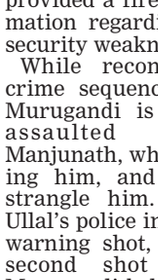
> **No infrastructure developments mentioned in the budget. Bengaluru appears modern, but roads are dug up, full of potholes, and lack proper footpaths and skywalks. There's no last-mile connectivity, and the airport is too far. Women's safety remains a major issue. Rather than promising world-class amenities, why do they not provide basic facilities to the public?**
>
> -Swetha Dixit, IT professional

> **Farmers have been demanding a law to ensure a minimum support price for all agricultural produce. Instead of this, the governments are writing off corporate loans. Last year, the government slashed the agricultural budget to just three per cent of the total Union budget, which is shameful**
>
> -Kuruburu Shanthakumar, Farmer leader

> **How will the poor survive? The government must control rising prices of vegetables, fruits, and daily essentials.**
>
> -Mumtaz Taj, Homemaker



> **Government schemes sound promising, but the registration process is exhausting. Portals often crash, and there's no coordination between government, banks, and private firms. Heavy taxation is crushing businesses. Government must ease the process and help people get into businesses.**
>
> -Suresh Kumar, Entrepreneur



> **While the new scheme for women entrepreneurs particularly from the backward class is good, I was looking forward to something more for women. Many women quit work due to household responsibilities. It is open-secret that these loan schemes are not easily available for deserving women**
>
> -Neha Khan, Frazer Town resident

'Budget a missed chance for educational reforms'

MANSOOR ALI KHAN
BENGALURU, 1 FEB

The Union Budget 2025 was a chance to tackle the growing crisis in learning and improve student retention. However, instead of addressing key issues like teacher training, dropout rates, and equitable access, the government has prioritised projects with little impact at the grassroots level.

The learning crisis & dropout rates

The 2024-2025 Economic Survey boasts of 93 per cent enrolment at the primary level, but the reality is stark—only 63.8 per cent of students stay in secondary school— and this drops to 45.6 per cent at the higher secondary level. Instead of focusing on remedial education, student support systems, and curriculum reform, the Budget remains fixated on infrastructure-driven metrics, favouring visible gains over meaningful progress.

AI & education: Fix the foundation first

The Rs 500 crore allocated for a Centre of Excellence in AI for education is certainly forward-looking but it raises an important question: Why prioritise futuristic solutions when basic education needs urgent attention?

Digital infrastructure without support

Broadband connectivity for all government secondary schools sounds promising. But what about device availability, teacher training, and digital literacy programmes? Past digital initiatives have shown that without proper implementation, such schemes fail to create real impact.

Higher education: Favouring the elite

The government is expanding IITs and adding 6,500 new seats, but what about the thousands of underfunded public universities and State colleges that serve the majority of students?

> **instead of addressing key issues like teacher training, dropout rates, and equitable access, the government has prioritised projects with little impact at the grassroots level**
>
> -Mansoor Ali Khan

Expanding medical education without suport

Increasing 10,000 medical seats this year is the need of the hour, but where are the faculty, infrastructure, and resources to maintain quality? If we do not invest in training faculty and improving medical education standards, we risk producing underqualified doctors.

The way forward

Instead of flashy announcements, India needs a fair, inclusive, and practical education policy that focuses on real impact. Here are a few suggestions:

- Teacher training and welfare over superficial reforms.
- Public universities and colleges over exclusive elite institutions.
- Remedial education over tech-driven optics.

—Salar News
The author is AICC Secretary and an educationist

Gig workers back ID move but seek simplified process

BENGALURU, 1 FEB

Union Budget 2025-26 has brought a significant move for the gig workers, with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announcing that one crore gig workers across India will receive official identity cards and healthcare benefits under the Prandhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.

While delivery executives working with platforms like Swiggy, Zomato, Zepto, and BigBasket in Bengaluru have welcomed the move, they stress that the process of availing these benefits must be simple and efficient.

Vinay Sarathi, president of the United Food Delivery Partners' Union, acknowledged the initiative as a positive step but argued that gig workers deserve more. "Identity cards will give gig workers formal recognition, which is important. But the government should have extended provident fund (PF) and Employees' State Insurance (ESI) benefits to gig workers," he said.

Rakshith, a food delivery executive who also works as a hotel cashier, expressed mixed feelings. "With low salaries, I have to manage two jobs to sustain my family," he said.

However, Vinay Sarathi pointed out gaps in execution. "Some insurance schemes were introduced after our demands, but I have yet to see anyone successfully claim these benefits." *—Salar News*

Industrial sector back Budget's growth focus

BENGALURU, 1 FEB

Karnataka industry stalwarts welcomed the union budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitaraman on Saturday, saying the focus on infra, consumption, and investment will help economy.

Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw, Executive Chairperson of Biocon Limited said the Union Budget 2025 is reassuring, as it instils confidence that India is investing in the right areas to drive stable and inclusive economic growth.

With progressive reforms in infrastructure, manufacturing and ease of doing business, the Budget fosters an environment for innovation and investment, said CII Karnataka State Council Vice-Chairman Rabindra Srikantan. *—PTI*

PMAY target for Bidar increased, says Khandre

BIDAR, 1 FEB

Local MP Sagar Khandre on Saturday said the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana–Rural (PMAY-R) target for Bidar Lok Sabha constituency in the current financial year has been revised to 50,380 houses. He has asked the beneficiaries listed in the priority list to submit the required documents to their respective Gram Panchayats by 15 February. The category-wise and caste-wise priority lists of the sanctioned houses are already available at the Gram Panchayat. Beneficiaries can verify their names and submit essential details, such as bank account number, Aadhaar number and ration card at these offices, Khandre said. The MP has also asked the Panchayat Development Officers and District Education Officers to visit the homes of eligible persons and complete their registration after collecting necessary data and documents and upload their geo-tagged photographs into the software for approval by the District Panchayat by 15 February. *—Salar News*

IN SOUTH BENGALURU

Heading out? Request cops to keep an eye on your house

BENGALURU, 1 FEB

With an increasing number of house break-in thefts (HBT) in Bengaluru, the South Division Police have introduced a security measure to protect locked homes from burglars. The local resident planning to stay away from their homes for a few days can now register their details with the police for surveillance.

They can call the Police Control Room at 080-22943111 or mobile number 9480801500 and provide their address, contact details and a picture of their residence. This information will be forwarded to the relevant police station, which will conduct periodic checks under the Locked House Checking System.

Police said 879 HBT cases were reported in the city in 2023, whereas 702 were reported in 2022. In 2021, the police registered 654 such cases.

A resident of Adugodi, Azeezullah said, "This was much needed. Recently a group of thieves burgled several house in our locality. Some of them were caught after the police identified them from CCTV footage," he said.

20 houses were burgled in Avalahalli police limits recently. CCTV footages showed masked burglars breaking and entering locked houses ***PHOTO: X***

At least 20 houses were burgled within Avalahalli police limits recently. The CCTV showed burglars wearing masks and dark clothing breaking and entering locked houses in the locality.

Manjunath, an advocate, said he lost valuables including jewellery and cash worth Rs 3.5 lakh. "The matter is under investigation. I have no idea how long it will take," he said.

Deputy Commissioner of Police, South Division, Lokesh B Jagalasar, said, "This measure is part of our continuous efforts to enhance security in residential areas and prevent break-ins when citizens area away from their homes." *–Salar News*

Dacoity suspect shot at during escape in M'luru

MANGALURU, 1 FEB

A suspect linked to the Kotekar Cooperative Bank dacoity was injured in a police shooting while allegedly trying to flee during an evidence recovery operation in Ullal on Thursday. The accused, identified as Murugandi Thevar, is currently in police custody until 3 February as part of the investigation into the robbery reported at Ullal Police Station.

During his interrogation, Murugandi revealed details about the dacoity's planning and execution, implicating a local associate, Shashi Thevar. According to police, they convened in November 2024 near Ajjanadka to plan the robbery, during which Shashi allegedly provided a firearm and information regarding the bank's security weaknesses.

While reconstructing the crime sequence at the site, Murugandi is said to have assaulted Constable Manjunath, who was restraining him, and attempted to strangle him. In response, Ullal's police inspector fired a warning shot, followed by a second shot that struck Murugandi below the knee as he continued to flee. *—PTI*

Actor Prakash Raj ***PHOTO: PTI***

Actor Raj sues activist for 'Maha Kumbh dip' claim

MYSURU, 1 FEB

Renowned multilingual Kannada actor Prakash Raj has lodged a police complaint at Lakshmipura Police Station against Prashanth Sambargi for allegedly circulating a digitally manipulated image of him purportedly taking a dip in the Triveni Sangam during the Maha Kumbh Mela in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh. The image, shared on social media with a derogatory caption, aims to tarnish the actor's reputation.

Upon arriving in Mysuru from Bengaluru, Prakash Raj reported the incident to the police, leading to the registration of a First Information Report (FIR) against Sambargi under section 333(4) BNS 2023, which addresses forgery intended to harm one's reputation.

In a statement to reporters, Raj clarified that he never participated in the event depicted in the image. He emphasised his respect for all religions while asserting his belief in humanity over religious practices. "I'm filing this complaint to teach a lesson to those like Sambargi who spread falsehoods, as such fake news impacts societal harmony," he stated.

Sambargi is required to present himself to the Lakshmipuram police within 15 days to explain the dissemination of this false information. *–Salar News*

SECTOR-WISE EXPENDITURE

	(In Rs Cr)	% increase from 2024
Defence	4,91,732	7.5%
Rural Development	2,66,817	0.3%
Home Affairs	2,33,211	35.2%
Agriculture	1,71,437	11.4%
Education	1,28,650	2.34%
Health	98,311	9.17%
Urban Development	96,777	NA
IT and Telecom	95,298	-22%
Energy	81,174	15.2%
Commerce & Industry	65,553	27.4%
Social Welfare	60,052	5.9%

AGRICULTURE

- Launch a 6-year Aatmanirbharta. Mission with special focus on Tur, Urad and Masoor.
- NAFED & NCCF to procure pulses from farmers for 4 years.
- 5-year mission for cotton productivity.
- Urea plant in Namrup, Assam, with 12.7 lakh metric tonnes annual capacity.
- Second gene bank to be set up for future food security.
- Comprehensive programmes for vegetables & fruits development.

INFRASTRUCTURE & URBAN DEVELOPMENT

- Rs 1 lakh crore for city growths, redevelopment, water & sanitation under Urban challenge fund.
- Jal Jeevan Mission extended to 2028 for 100% rural tap water coverage.
- Rs 10 lakh crore to funds new projects from 2025-2030. Govt will sell assets to fund this.
- Each ministry will have 3-year PPP plan.

MSME SECTOR

- Credit guarantee cover for MSME double from Rs 5 cr to Rs 10 cr, giving an additional Rs 1.5 lakh crore in credit for next five years.
- The benefit provided under Section 80-IAC to startups will be extended for five years.
- National Manufacturing Mission to boost 'Make in India.'
- Credit cover for start-ups doubled to Rs 20 crore with 1% fee for 27 focus sectors.
- Import duty exempted on wet blue leather.
- Leather sector to eyes Rs 4 lakh cr turnover with 22 lakh jobs.
- Customised credit cards with Rs 5 lakh limit for 10 lakh micro enterprises via Udyam.
- Term loans up to Rs 2 crore for 5 lakh new entrepreneurs (women, SC/ST) over 5 years.
- India to be made into a global toy hub.

TRAVEL AND TOURISM

- 'Heal in India' to boost medical tourism with easier visas.
- MUDRA loans for homestays to support small businesses.

TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

- National Geospatial Mission to modernise land records, urban planning, infrastructure.
- Gyan Bharatam Mission to digitise conserving 1 crore+ ancient manuscripts.
- Rs 20,000 crore for private sector-driven research & innovation.
- Deep Tech Fund of Rs 10,000 crore for advanced startups in AI, biotech, and space tech.

SOCIAL WELFARE

- Govt to exempt social welfare surcharge 82 tariff lines that are subject to cess.
- Compliance burden reduced for small charitable trusts.
- Rs 300 crore for the modernisation of prisons during the next financial year.
- Rs 30,000 UPI-linked credit for 68 lakh street vendors.

Citizens can save up to ₹1.10 lakh in taxes per year

'People's budget' to help middle class

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Individuals having an annual income of Rs 24 lakh or more can hope to save of Rs 1.10 lakh in income tax, while those earning Rs 12 lakh will have to pay no tax, benefiting to the tune of Rs 80,000 from next fiscal under the new regime.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget exempted, from income tax, persons earning up to Rs 12 lakh per annum and rejigged the tax slabs under the new tax regime.

As per government calculations, people with income of Rs 13 lakh a year will save Rs 25,000 on tax liability.

Similarly, people having annual income of Rs 14 lakh will save Rs 30,000, Rs 15 lakh (Rs 35,000), Rs 16 lakh (Rs 50,000), Rs 17 lakh (Rs 60,000).

In case of income of Rs 18 lakh the savings would be Rs 70,000, Rs 19 lakh (Rs 80,000), Rs 20 lakh (Rs 90,000).

Those earning Rs 21 lakh will stand to save Rs 95,000 in their tax liability, Rs 22 lakh (Rs 1 lakh), Rs 23 lakh (Rs 1.05 lakh crore).

Income	Tax on Slabs and rates		Benefit of	Rebate benefit	Total Benefit	Tax after rebate Benefit
	Present	Proposed	Rate /Slab	Full upto Rs 12 lacs		
8 lac	30,000	20,000	10,000	20,000	30,000	0
9 lac	40,000	30,000	10,000	30,000	40,000	0
10 lac	50,000	40,000	10,000	40,000	50,000	0
11 lac	65,000	50,000	15,000	50,000	65,000	0
12 lac	80,000	60,000	20,000	60,000	80,000	0
16 lac	1,70,000	1,20,000	50,000	0	50,000	1,20,000
20 lac	2,90,000	2,00,000	90,000	0	90,000	2,00,000
24 lac	4,10,000	3,00,000	1,10,000	0	1,10,000	3,00,000
50 lac	11,90,000	10,80,000	1,10,000	0	1,10,000	10,80,000

For those earning over Rs 24 lakh, can look forward to a tax benefit of Rs 1.10 lakh.

Sitharaman, in her 2025-26 Budget proposed new tax slabs under which people earning up to Rs 12 lakh will pay Nil tax. For salaried class, this limit could go up to Rs 12.75 lakh per annum after taking into account standard deduction of Rs 75,000.

For those with income of more than Rs 12 lakh and filing ITR under new tax regime, Budget has revised the tax slabs for computing tax liability on income earned in 2025-26 fiscal. Under the new slab, income up to Rs 4 lakh will be exempt. A 5 per cent tax will be levied for income earned between Rs 4 and 8 lakh, 10 per cent for Rs 8-12 lakh, 15 per cent for Rs 12-16 lakh.

A 20 per cent income tax will be levied on income between Rs 16 and 20 lakh, 25 per cent on Rs 20-24 lakh and 30 per cent above Rs 24 lakh per annum. *—PTI*

NEW GEOSPATIAL MISSION AIMS TO REVAMP LAND RECORDS

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman introduced the National Geospatial Mission in Budget 2025-26, aimed at modernising land records and enhancing urban planning. By leveraging the PM Gati Shakti framework, the mission will create a foundational geospatial infrastructure to support better execution of infrastructure projects. Geospatial data, linked to specific locations, will streamline land reforms, improve transparency, and benefit both government agencies and private sectors like geospatial and drone companies. This initiative aligns with India's development goals, addressing challenges in resource management, climate change, and land disputes, while enhancing governance and decision-making. Experts view it as a vital step for sustainable urban development. ***—Agencies***

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday announced the government's plan to transform India into a large logistics organisation with 1.5 lakh rural post offices. Sitaraman said India Post will be transformed into a large public logistic organisation with 1.5 lakh rural post offices to become a catalyst for the rural economy. She also announced the government's plan to set up a urea plant with a 12.7 lakh tonne capacity in Assam. She also announced the enhancement of investment and turnover limit. *—PTI*

INDIA POST TO BE TURNED INTO LARGE LOGISTIC BODY WITH 1.5 LAKH RURAL POST OFFICES

TALE OF TWO STATES

Bihar gets a bonanza, Andhra cruelly ignored, says Cong

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

The Congress party has voiced strong criticism of the Modi government's recent budget announcements, particularly highlighting perceived disparities in allocations for different states. The focus of the Union Budget for the fiscal year 2025-26 was notably on Bihar, where Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman unveiled a series of initiatives including the establishment of a Makhana Board, funding for the western Kosi canal, and enhanced capabilities for IIT Patna.

Sitharaman, during her eighth consecutive budget presentation, also announced the creation of a National Institute of Food Technology, Entrepreneurship, and Management in Bihar, as well as plans for greenfield airports to support the state's future development needs.

In response, Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh remarked that it was evident Bihar had received a "bonanza" of announcements in light of the upcoming elections there. He questioned the "cruel neglect" of Andhra Pradesh, the other pillar of the NDA, drawing attention to the BJP's alliances with both the Janata Dal (United) in Bihar and the Telugu Desam Party in Andhra Pradesh.

Furthermore, Ramesh expressed disappointment over the government's approach to nutritional support programmes like Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0. While the Finance Minister announced enhancements to cost norms for these initiatives, Ramesh pointed out the lack of provisions for including breakfast in schools and increasing the honorarium for Anganwadi workers, questioning the government's commitment to investing in its citizens. *—PTI*

Oppositions members stage a brief walkout during the budget reading over the Maha Kumbh stampede. **Photo Credits: PTI**

"The budget is progressive (pragatisheel) and futuristic (bhavishyonmukhi). The Makhana board would boost the cultivation of foxnuts and Greenfield airports would address the state's future needs.

—Nitesh Kumar, Bihar CM

"These are all old things with some repackaging. Why is the Centre silent on projects like a new airport at Bihta, on the outskirts of Patna? There is not even a special economic package for the poor state.

Tejashwi Yadav, RJD leader

A band-aid for bullet wounds! Amid global uncertainty, solving our economic crisis demanded a paradigm shift. But this government is bankrupt of ideas.

Rahul Gandhi, Congress leader

The applause you heard from BJP benches was for middle-class. If you have a salary, you may be paying less tax. The important question is, what happens if we don't have a salary?

Shashi Tharoor, Cong MP

The Union Budget was biased in completely ignoring Tamil Nadu and betrayed the expectation of the people. The demands are numerous; highways and railway projects, Coimbatore and Madurai Metro Rail projects. Why has nothing been given?

MK Stalin, Chief Minister

EDUCATION

- 10,000 scholarships for IITs/IISc under PM Research Fellowship.
- 50,000 Atal Tinkering Labs in govt schools over 5 years.
- Bharatiya Bhasha Pustak Scheme to digitise books in schools & higher education institute.
- No Tax Collected at Source (TCS) is applied for remittances up to Rs 7 lakh.
  0.5% TCS on education loan. 20% TCS on non-educational remittances.

DEFENCE

- Aircraft and aero engines: Rs 48,614 cr
- Naval fleet: Rs 24,390 cr
- Border Roads Organisation: 7146 cr
- BSF: Rs 28,231.27 cr
- CISF: Rs 16,084.83 cr
- Assam Rifles: Rs 8,274.29 cr
- NDRF: Rs 1,922.59 crore
- Rs 41,000 cr for Jammu and Kashmir

CIVIL AVIATION

- Civil Aviation Ministry: Rs 2,400 cr
- UDAN allocation lower at Rs 540 cr

ENERGY SECTOR

- Rs 5,876 reserved for oil purchases via Strategic Petroleum Reserves.
- Rs 26,549cr for clean energy initiative.
- Green Manufacturing – Incentives for solar PV cells, EV batteries, electrolyzers & wind turbines.

ELECTRONIC VEHICLES

- 25 additional capital goods for EV battery manufacturing.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT TAX

- Income tax limit will be Rs 12.75 lakh for salaried taxpayers due to a standard deduction of Rs 75,000.
- Revenue of about Rs 1 lakh crore in direct taxes will be forgone.
- New Income-Tax Bill to be clear and simple.
- Propose to remove 7 tariff rates, after this only 8 tariff rates remain.

GOVT SET TO HIKE FDI LIMIT FOR INSURANCE SECTOR TO
100%

DIRECT, INDIRECT TAXES COMPRISE
66 PAISE
OF EVERY RUPEE IN GOVT COFFER

President Droupadi Murmu offers auspicious dahi cheeni to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman ahead of her Union Budget presentation at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, in New Delhi on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Atomic power gets a boost

Nuclear mission gets ₹20,000 cr; pvt players welcome

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday announced a slew of steps to boost atomic power in the country with a Rs 20,000-crore Nuclear mission, roping in private players by amending legal framework and development of five small modular reactors indigenously.

Sitharaman also announced that all those states going ahead with power reforms would be eligible for additional borrowing equal to 0.5 per cent of their GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product).

Under the Nuclear Energy Mission, she added that Viksit Bharat Development of at least 100GW by 2047 is essential for our energy transition efforts.

For an active partnership with the private sector towards this goal, amendments to the Atomic Energy Act and Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act will be taken up, she said.

She further announced that a Nuclear Energy Mission for research and development of small modular reactors with an outlay of Rs 20,000 crore will be set up.

At least five indigenously developed small modular reactors will be operationalised by 2033, she added.

At present, India has 462 GW of power generation capacity, including 8 GW of nuclear power. *—PTI*

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CBI gets ₹1,071 crore

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

The Centre has allocated Rs 1,071.05 crore to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the Union Budget 2025-26 announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday, a nominal increase of Rs 84.12 crore from the ongoing fiscal.

The government has allocated Rs 1,071.05 crore to the agency for 2025–26, the Budget presented by Sitharaman said.

"The provision is for establishment-related expenditure of the CBI which is entrusted with investigation and prosecution in corruption cases against public servants, private persons, firms and other cases of serious crimes," the Budget document said.

This also includes provisions for various projects such as modernisation of training centres of the CBI, establishment of technical and forensic support units, comprehensive modernisation and purchase of land, and construction of office and residence buildings for the agency, it said. *—PTI*

Ministry of Minority Affairs gets ₹3,350 crore

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

A total of Rs 3,350 crore has been allocated for the Ministry of Minority Affairs in the Union Budget this year, which is about Rs 166 crore more than the budgetary estimate of the previous financial year and Rs 1,481 crore more than the revised estimate of 2024-25.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the budget for the financial year 2025-26 on Saturday. In the last budget, Rs 3,183.24 crore was the budget estimate for the ministry, although the revised estimate was Rs 1,868.18 crore. This time, in the allocation made by Sitharaman, a provision of Rs 678.03 crore has been made for the educational empowerment of students of minority communities. A total of Rs 1,237.32 crore has been allocated for major schemes. A budgetary allocation of Rs 1,913.98 crore has been made for the total 'Umbrella Programme for Development of Minorities'. *—PTI*

A FRIEND IN NEED

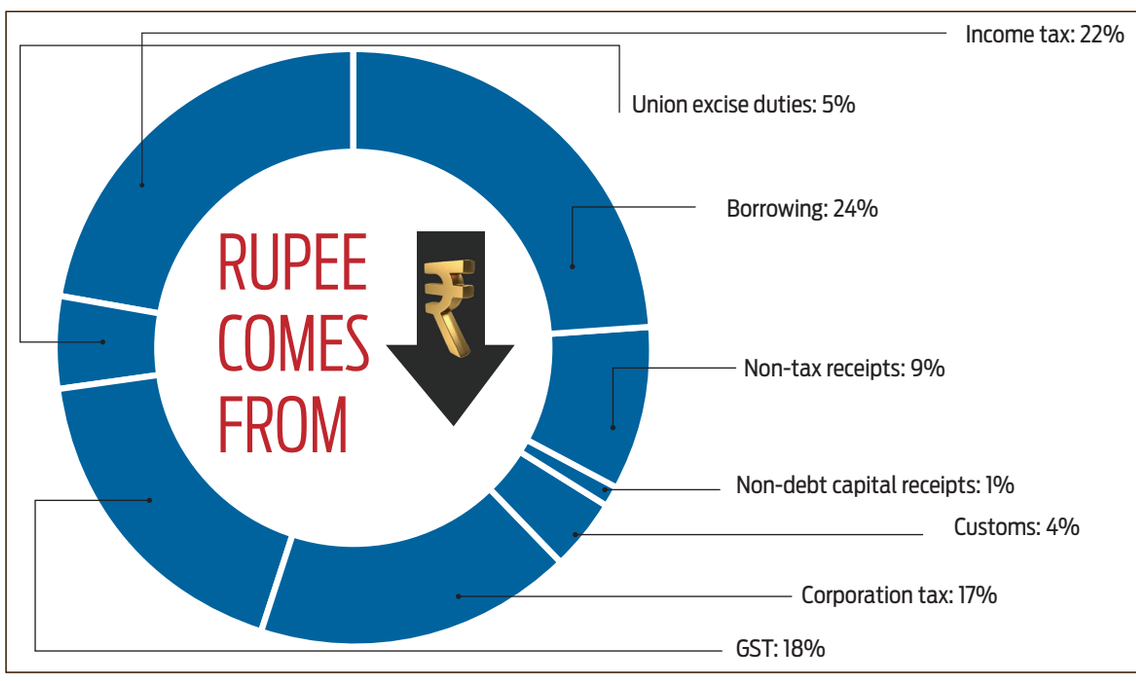
India keeps the 'Neighbourhood First Policy' alive even in its Budget. Let us take a look at who got what

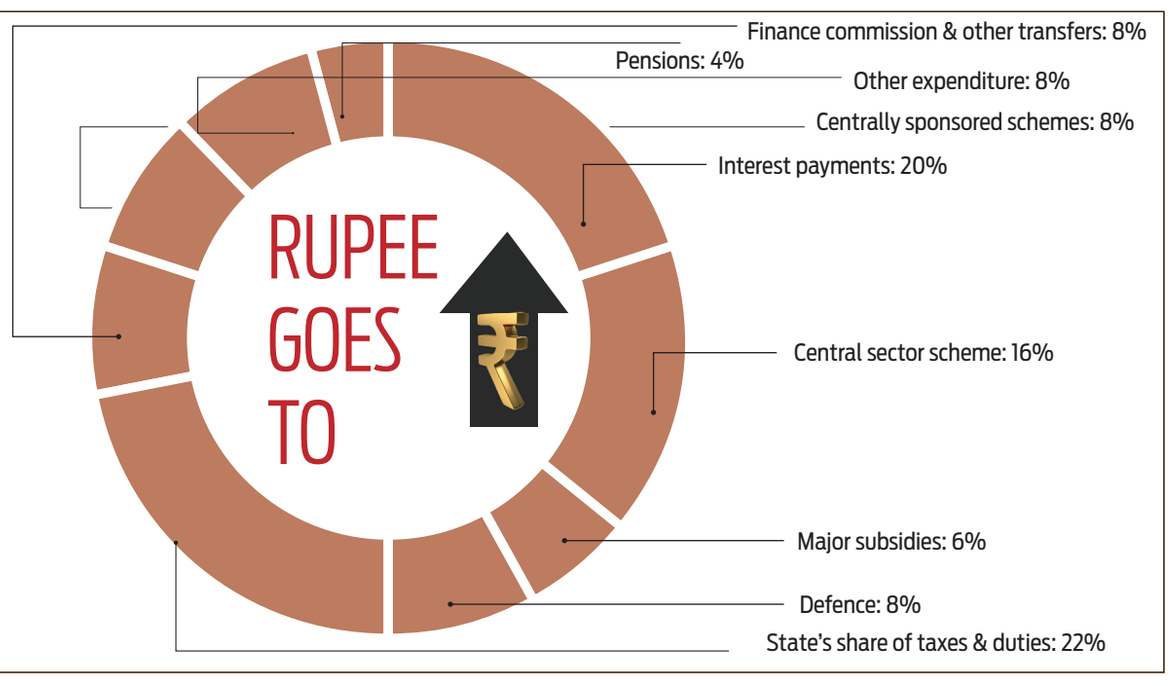
Bhutan	Rs 2,150 cr (Rs 2,543 cr)
Nepal	Rs 700 cr (no change)
Maldives	Rs 600 cr (Rs 470 cr)
Myanmar	Rs 350 cr (Rs 400 cr)
Sri Lanka	Rs 300 cr (no change)
Bangladesh	Rs 120 cr (no change)
Afghanistan	Rs 100 cr (Rs 50 cr)

In brackets: 2024 allocation

GST COLLECTIONS TO INCREASE

- GST collection in 2024-25 is estimated to rise 11% to Rs 10.62 lakh crore. FY '26 GST revenue projections will be watched as the revenue growth has slowed over the last three months in the current fiscal.





AI IN EDUCATION

Tech in focus, new 'fund of funds' for startups

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

New and emerging technologies were in focus in the Union Budget, as Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a national framework for Global Capability Centres (GCCs), Rs 500-crore Centre of Excellence in AI for education and said a deep tech Fund of Funds will be explored to catalyse the next generation startups.

A new Fund of Funds, with expanded scope and a fresh contribution of additional Rs 10,000 crore is also on anvil.

A national framework will be formulated as guidance to states for promoting Global Capability Centres in emerging Tier-2 cities. This will suggest measures for enhancing availability of talent and infrastructure, building bye-law reforms, and mechanisms for collaboration with industry.

A new 'fund of funds', with expanded scope and a fresh contribution of additional Rs 10,000 crore is also on anvil **PHOTO: FREEPIK**

"I had announced three Centres of Excellence in Artificial Intelligence for agriculture, health, and sustainable cities in 2023. Now a Centre of Excellence in Artificial Intelligence for education will be set up with a total outlay of Rs 500 crore," Sitharaman said.

Startups have a reason for cheer also as a new Fund of Funds with expanded scope and a fresh contribution of additional Rs 10,000 crore will be set up.

"The Alternate Investment Funds (AIFs) for startups have received commitments of more than Rs 91,000 crore. These are supported by the Fund of Funds set up with a government contribution of Rs 10,000 crore. Now, a new fund of funds, with expanded scope and a fresh contribution of another Rs 10,000 crore will be set up," she said. *—PTI*

Nirmala's Budget anti-farmer and anti-worker, say farmer groups

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Farmer organisations on Saturday slammed the Union Budget for "cruelly" neglecting their longstanding demand for a legally guaranteed Minimum Support Price for all crops and farm loan-waiver, and announced a protest on 5 February against the "anti-farmer, anti-worker, anti-poor and pro-corporate Budget".

In a statement issued here, the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) said the Budget 2025-26 proposals for more deregulation and liberalisation, including a 100 percent privatisation of the insurance sector, are dangerous when the economy is facing serious challenges in the context of the intensifying corporate hegemony on all sectors including agriculture, manufacturing and services.

"The budget has cruelly neglected the long-pending demand for legally guaranteed MSP at C2+50 percent for all crops. This needs to be critically viewed in the context of an unchecked increase in corporate profits that amounted to Rs 10, 88,000 crore in 2022-23 and rose to Rs 14, 11,000 crore in 2023-24," the SKM said.

The Samyukt Kisan Morch (Non-Political) and Kisan Majdoor Morcha (KMM), which are leading the sit-in protests along the Punjab-Haryana border, said the Budget led to disappointment among farmers. *—PTI*

Zakia Jafri, wife of ex-Cong MP killed in 2002 riots, dies

AHMEDABAD, 1 FEB

Zakia Jafri, the wife of former Congress MP Ehsan Jafri who was killed in the 2002 Gujarat riots, died on Saturday in Ahmedabad at the age of 86. Ehsan Jafri was among 69 people who were killed inside Gulbarg Society, a Muslim neighbourhood in Ahmedabad, on 28 February, 2002, a day after coaches of the Sabarmati Express train were burnt in Godhra, resulting in the deaths of 59 'karsevaks' returning from Ayodhya. The incident triggered horrific rioting across the state. Zakia hit the national headlines as she waged a legal battle all the way to the Supreme Court in a bid to hold top political leaders accountable for the large conspiracy for the riots post the Godhra train burning episode. *—PTI*

Manipur: 45 acres of illicit poppy fields destroyed

IMPHAL, 1 FEB

Illicit poppy cultivation spanning 45 acres has been eradicated in Kangpokpi district, Manipur, as confirmed by Chief Minister N Biren Singh. The operation took place on Friday in the hill range of Lhungjang village, under the jurisdiction of the Saikul police station, involving both district police and the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) alongside an executive magistrate. Singh noted that First Information Reports (FIRs) have been lodged to initiate further action related to the cultivation. He praised the efforts of the forces in the ongoing anti-drug campaign. *—PTI*

S Somanath to be honoured with Malliyoor award

KOTTAYAM, 1 FEB

S Somanath, the former Chairman of ISRO, to be honoured with the Malliyoor Shankar Smriti Award in recognition of his significant contributions to science. This award, established in memory of celebrated Sanskrit scholar and Bhagavatham exponent Malliyoor Sankaran Namboothiri, includes a monetary prize of Rs 100,000, a citation, and a plaque. The award was first instituted in 2012, with former Indian President and rocket scientist APJ Abdul Kalam as its inaugural recipient. The honour is bestowed upon individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the fields of arts, literature, science, and spirituality. Additionally, 'harikatha' performer Visakha Hari has been selected for the Malliyoor Ganesha Award, which comes with a cash prize of Rs 25,000. The awards ceremony is scheduled for 2 February. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X

5 Nepalese returning from Kumbh killed

MUZAFFARPUR, 1 FEB

Five people from Nepal, including three women, were killed on Saturday when the SUV in which they were returning from the Mahakumbh at Prayagraj in UP met with an accident in Bihar, police said. The accident took place in the Muzaffarpur district where the SUV overturned while speeding on a highway, said Deputy Superintendent of Police Vineeta Sinha. "According to the eyewitnesses, the driver took a sharp turn, trying to avoid hitting a motorcycle. All the occupants belonged to the Mahottari district of Nepal," she said. "While five people , three of them women, died on the spot, the remaining four were seriously injured and have been referred to a hospital in Patna," she added. *—PTI*

Maharashtra GBS death toll rises to 4; 1 dead in Assam

Among 140 suspected patients, 98 confirmed as GBS in M'rashtra

PUNE, 1 FEB

The number of suspected fatalities from Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), a rare neurological disorder, has increased to four in Maharashtra, with health officials reporting a total of 140 cases in the state.

A 36-year-old male succumbed to "trauma to the respiratory system due to pneumonia" at Yashwantrao Chavan Memorial Hospital in Pimpri Chinchwad on Thursday. The latest suspected victim, a 60-year-old man from the Dhayari area near Sinhgad Road, passed away on Friday after being admitted on 27 January with severe diarrhoea and weakness in his lower limbs. He reportedly died from cardiac arrest, according to the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) health department.

E.coli bacteria were detected in a sample from private borewells near Sinhgad Road, Maharashtra **PHOTO: REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE**

Among the 140 suspected patients, 98 have been confirmed as GBS cases, with 26 from Pune city, 78 from newly incorporated villages in the PMC area, and others from surrounding districts. Fortunately, no new cases were reported on Friday.

The majority of infections are concentrated in Pune and neighbouring locations. Following the uptick in GBS cases, 160 water samples were tested in Pune, revealing contamination in eight sources. Notably, E.coli bacteria were detected in a sample from private borewells near Sinhgad Road, indicating potential faecal contamination, which may contribute to GBS infection.

1 dead in Assam

A 17-year-old girl died at a private hospital here due to suspected Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS), the first such case in Assam in the current season, doctors of the health facility said on Saturday. There was no official confirmation from the hospital and the state health department.

"The girl's condition worsened and was put on ventilator support. It was a very severe variety of GBS," the doctor said. *—PTI*

Bird flu: 17,000 chickens and quails culled in Raigarh

RAIGARH, 1 FEB

A significant outbreak of bird flu has been confirmed in Raigarh, Chhattisgarh, leading to the culling of at least 17,000 chickens and quails at a state-run poultry farm. This decisive action follows the discovery of several dead birds at the facility in Chakradhar Nagar, prompting authorities to send samples to the National Institute of High-Security Animal Diseases (NIHSAD) in Bhopal for testing. Results identifying the H5N1 virus were received on Friday evening.

In response, Raigarh Collector Kartikeya Goel convened an emergency meeting with senior officials to strategise on containment measures. A joint operation, conducted overnight by personnel from municipal, veterinary, and health departments, led to the culling of 5,000 chickens and 12,000 quails, in addition to the destruction of 17,000 eggs and poultry feed.

PHOTO: X

A strict 1 km 'infected zone' has been established around the affected farm, with a wider 10 km 'surveillance zone' ensuring additional precautions. Movement of poultry, eggs, and related products is prohibited in these areas, and compensation will be provided to affected bird owners.

Officials confirmed that there is currently no threat to human populations, although residents are advised to remain vigilant. Dr Bhanu Patel of the Raigarh health department has indicated that health teams will conduct door-to-door surveys to ensure timely treatment for anyone displaying symptoms. *—PTI*

9 killed as cruiser plunges into Bhakra canal in Haryana

CHANDIGARH, 1 FEB

Nine people including five women died while three are still missing after a Force Motors Cruiser carrying 14 passengers plunged into the Bhakra canal in Haryana's Fatehabad district, police said on Saturday.

A man and an 11-year-old boy were rescued, police said, adding that a rescue operation is underway.

The accident occurred at Sardarewala village in Ratia on Friday night, when dense fog engulfed the area, police said.

The passengers, many of whom were from Mehmara village, were returning after attending a wedding ceremony at a village in Punjab's Fazilka district, police said.

- When the Cruiser reached near Sardarewala village, the driver lost control of the vehicle because of low visibility caused by dense fog, and it fell into the Bhakra canal

When the Cruiser reached near Sardarewala village, the driver reportedly lost control of the vehicle because of low visibility caused by dense fog, and it fell into the Bhakra canal, they said.

Nine bodies have been retrieved so far and efforts are ongoing to trace three more missing passengers, Deputy Superintendent of Police (Ratia) Sanjay Kumar said.

Among those killed, Five women and an 11-year-old girl were among those killed, the officer said.

Water level in the canal was reduced, police said, adding that teams of the National Disaster Response Force, State Disaster Response Force and divers are conducting the rescue operation. *—PTI*

SERIES OF BLASTS

Rescue operation underway after a fire broke out following a series of blasts in a truck carrying gas cylinders, in Ghaziabad, Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

SC to hear PIL on misuse of women-centric laws

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear a Public Interest Litigation, or PIL, alleging misuse of women-centric laws on 3 February.

The PIL names laws like the Dowry Prohibition Act, the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, and the provision on cruelty to women in the Indian Penal Code to question their validity.

The plea is scheduled to be heard by a bench of Justices BR Gavai and K Vinod Chandran.

The plea filed by petitioner Rupshi Singh highlights the malice in law, the unreasonableness contained in the impugned provisions and the lack of semblance of law in the provisions.

The PIL says that the Dowry Prohibition Act, 1961 is discriminatory on the ground of religion and further assails the provisions of the Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 as being women-centric and discriminatory against men. *—PTI*

Hyd sisters live with mom's body for 9 days

HYDERABAD, 1 FEB

Two young sisters lived with the corpse of their mother in their home for over a week, overwhelmed by grief following her death, police reported.

The tragic situation came to light when the sisters sought assistance from the police on 31 January. Their 45-year-old mother did not awaken from her sleep on 23 January, prompting the daughters, aged 25 and 22, to realise that she had passed away, as all signs of life had ceased. Overcome with sorrow, they remained secluded in their house, keeping the doors shut since the incident. Neighbours reportedly did not detect any unpleasant odours coming from the relatively isolated residence, police noted.

PHOTO: ANI

- The sisters, who work as sales assistants after completing their education up to Intermediate and degree levels, have no known relatives, as their father left several years ago

On the evening of 31 January, the sisters visited the local MLA's camp office to explain they lacked funds for a funeral. They were advised to go to the police for further assistance. The sisters, who work as sales assistants after completing their education up to Intermediate and degree levels, have no known relatives, as their father left several years ago. *—PTI*

FORMER CEC NAVIN CHAWLA DIES AT 79

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Navin Chawla has passed away at the age of 79, following brain surgery at Apollo Hospital.

His death prompted tributes from across the political spectrum, with former CEC SY Quraishi recalling a recent meeting where Chawla appeared cheerful despite his health issues. Chawla, who served as the 16th CEC from April 2009 to July 2010, was known for overseeing the controversial 2009 Lok Sabha elections. His tenure was not without criticism, particularly from the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which accused him of partisanship and demanded his removal through formal petitions to the government and the Supreme Court.

Born on 30 July 1945, Chawla was an officer of the 1969 Indian Administrative Service. He made significant contributions to electoral reforms, including enabling third-gender individuals to register as voters in a new 'Others' category. As a biographer of Mother Teresa, Chawla published several works highlighting her life and contributions. *—PTI*

Delhi needs Cong to save it: DKS

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar on Saturday expressed confidence in his party's prospects in the upcoming Delhi elections, stating that the strength of Congress is synonymous with the country's strength.

Shivakumar said, "Everyone knows that the strength of the Congress is the strength of the country.

The people of Delhi have given a chance to all parties. They know the difference between the governance of AAP, BJP and Congress."

The Congress leader highlighted former Delhi chief minister Sheila Dikshit's development-focused tenure as a model for governance, contrasting it with the "politics of hatred" by others. He said Delhi needs a change and that only Congress can save it.

As the election dates approach, the political atmosphere in the national capital has intensified.

Congress leader Supriya Shrinate on Friday said Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener Arvind Kejriwal is going to lose his seat in the upcoming Delhi Assembly elections.

Her remarks followed a challenge from Congress leader Sandeep Dikshit, who asked Kejriwal to publicly answer questions at Jantar Mantar.

"You were in power for 10 years...but you have nothing to talk about, even today, you keep cribbing... what did you do, that is what we want to know...he has become so upset because he knows that he will lose the election, this is the fear of defeat...," she said earlier. *—ANI*

AAP MLA 'attacked' during rally in Delhi

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

AAP MLA Mohinder Goyal was allegedly assaulted during a public rally in the Rohini area here on Saturday with party chief Arvind Kejriwal accusing the BJP of indulging in "hooliganism" in the face of an imminent defeat in the 5 February Assembly polls.

The incident took place at around 11am when Goyal, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) candidate from the Rithala Assembly segment, was interacting with the local residents of Pocket H in Sector 11.

"The AAP MLA was discussing with some people an old video of a local resident who has passed away. When the family members of the deceased found out about it, they arrived at the meeting and raised an objection," a senior police officer said.

This led to an argument between the two sides that escalated into a scuffle, he said. Both sides have filed complaints and police are conducting an investigation, the officer added. The officer asserted that Goyal was not injured in the incident. The AAP MLA, however, arrived in a wheelchair with bandages on his head and other body parts at another rally addressed by Kejriwal in the Rithala constituency. *—PTI*

POST STAMPEDE

Veteran officers to manage crowd at Kumbh

PRAYAGRAJ, 1 FEB

In response to a tragic stampede resulting in the deaths of at least 30 pilgrims, the Uttar Pradesh government has dispatched two senior IAS officers to ensure the Maha Kumbh Mela runs smoothly. Ashish Goyal and Bhanu Chandra Goswami, both of whom played pivotal roles in the successful organisation of the 2019 Ardh Kumbh, have been tasked with overseeing the event, particularly the upcoming Basant Panchami (Amrit Snan) on 3 February.

An official stated that Goyal and Goswami have extensive experience in crowd management and inter-agency coordination in Prayagraj, making them well-suited for their responsibilities. They join Mela Adhikari Vijay Kiran Anand, forming a seasoned team.

Ashish Goyal; Bhanu Chandra Goswami **PHOTO: ANI**

KP Singh, a retired Deputy Inspector General of Police who led security during the previous Kumbh, expressed confidence in the experienced officers' ability to facilitate a safe environment for devotees. Goyal, a 1995-batch IAS officer, has served in various key positions in Prayagraj, while Goswami, a 2009-batch officer, has held significant roles including District Magistrate. Their familiarity with local governance and experience in large-scale events will aid in addressing the logistical and safety challenges of the massive gathering.

To bolster security, the state government has assigned several senior police officers to manage crowd control and enhance security measures. The Maha Kumbh, a major Hindu pilgrimage, began on 13 January. *—PTI*

TAKING HOLY DIP

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar and his wife Sudesh Dhankhar perform rituals while taking holy dip at Sangam during the ongoing Maha Kumbh Mela 2025, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

TRUMP'S TARIFF DEADLINE TRIPS MKT

White House confirms President's decision of 25% tariff on Mexico & Canada, 10% on China

The White House accord to President Donald Trump's controversial decision erased significant gains, sending Wall Street lower at the close **PHOTO: PTI**

WASHINGTON, 1 FEB

US President Donald Trump's 1 February tariff deadline has sent Dow futures lower by nearly a percent, while gold and crude oil prices have risen higher overnight.

White House confirmed Trump's decision to impose a 25 per cent tariff on Mexico and Canada, and a 10 per cent tariff on China. This announcement erased significant gains, sending Wall Street lower at the close.

The US 10-year yield rose by two basis points to 4.54 per cent, while crude oil prices surged, with WTI crude climbing above USD 74 per barrel. Gold prices also hit a new high of USD 2,800/oz, as investors flocked to safe-haven assets. The CBoE VIX, a measure of market fear, increased due to concerns over the tariffs.

White House spokesperson Karoline Leavitt said that, "The President will implement 25per cent tariffs on Mexico and Canada, and a 10per cent tariff on China due to the illegal fentanyl they have allowed into our country, which has killed tens of millions of Americans."

The White House also dismissed a Reuters report suggesting that some tariffs might be excluded or delayed until 1 March.

When asked whether the tariff threats were a bargaining tactic, Trump responded, "No, it's not... we have big trade deficits with all three of them."

Bob Haberkorn, senior market strategist at RJO Futures, noted, "There's a lot of uncertainty and a wait-and-see attitude regarding tariffs on the geopolitical stage."

Max Gokhman of Franklin Templeton Investment Solutions added, "Bulls are trying to stay calm, but uncertainty keeps them from fully committing to stocks."

Tariff discussions have been ongoing since last year, and Trump's escalation of the threats after the inauguration has global markets closely watching the developments next week.

Meanwhile, US economists warn that these tariffs could reignite inflation, reversing the recent easing of price pressures. *—Agencies*

TRUMP LOOKS TO OUST 6 JAN RIOT INVESTIGATORS

WASHINGTON, 1 FEB

The Trump administration has ordered the US Justice Department to launched a sweeping purge of the FBI, targeting officials involved in past investigations of President Donald Trump and the 6 January Capitol riot.

The US media reports on Friday indicated that dozens of FBI agents, including senior officials, are being evaluated for removal, with some ordered to resign or face termination.

Top FBI officials were ordered to leave or face termination earlier in the week, reported the Washington Post.

The newspaper also reported that at least 30 federal prosecutors who had worked on Capitol riot cases have already been dismissed. *—DW News*

Democrats to pick a new face to counter Trump

OXON HILL, 1 FEB

Democrats, desperately seeking a new message and messengers to push back against the Trump administration, will elect a new leader Saturday in a low-profile Democratic National Committee (DNC) election that could have big implications for the party's future.

More than 400 DNC members from every state and US territory have gathered in suburban Washington for the election, which features a slate of candidates dominated by party insiders. Outgoing Chair Jaime Harrison is not seeking a re-election.

Most of the candidates acknowledge that the Democratic brand is badly damaged, but few are promising fundamental changes. Indeed, nearly three months after Donald Trump won the popular vote and gained ground among key Democratic constituencies, there is little agreement on what exactly went wrong.

"As we reel with shock at the horror that Trump is visiting on communities across this country, we need a DNC and a DNC chair who's ready to bring the intensity, the focus and the fury to fight back," said Ben Wikler, the Wisconsin Democratic chairman and a top candidate for DNC chair.

The election comes less than two weeks after Trump's inauguration as Democratic leaders struggle to confront the sheer volume of executive orders, pardons, personnel changes and controversial relationships taking shape in the new administration. *—PTI*

RUBIO TAKES OFF WITH MISSION PANAMA CANAL

WASHINGTON, 1 FEB

Secretary of State Marco Rubio embarks this weekend on his first foreign trip in office, heading to Central America to press President Donald Trump's top priority – curbing illegal immigration – and bring the message that the US wants to reclaim control over the Panama Canal despite intense resistance from regional leaders.

It's an unusual destination for the maiden voyage of America's top diplomat, whose predecessors have generally favoured Europe or Asia for initial outings.

It reflects not only the personal interest that Rubio has in the region but also the Trump's intent to focus much of its foreign policy energy close to home.

Limiting immigration and fighting narcotics smuggling are major elements of that effort, but another key priority will be curbing China's growing influence in the Western Hemisphere, topped by reasserting US control over the Panama Canal. *—PTI*

Venezuela frees six Americans after Trump's warning

CARACAS, 1 FEB

Venezuela on Friday released six detained Americans following a meeting with US special envoy Richard Grenell and President Nicolas Maduro. US President Donald Trump had dispatched Grenell to Caracas to warn Maduro of the consequences he would face should he not unconditionally accept the return of Venezuelans deported from the US. "We are wheels up and headed home with these 6 American citizens. They just spoke to Donald Trump and they couldn't stop thanking him," Grenell posted on social media. Grenell and the Venezuelan leader met at the Miraflores presidential palace where Maduro stressed the meeting had "zero agenda" and that he sought a "new beginning in bilateral relations" with the US, a government statement said. *—DW News*

Sri Lanka lifts ban on vehicle imports from 1 February

COLOMBO, 1 FEB

Sri Lanka on Friday finally lifted the import ban on cars, having last week allowed only trucks, buses and double cabs. CPresident Anura Kumara Dissanayake lifted the ban on vehicle imports with effect from 1 February. This has completely ended the ban on vehicle imports imposed in early 2020 with the Covid outbreak. The ban was continued when Sri Lanka suffered its economic crisis triggered by forex shortage. In April 2022, Sri Lanka declared its first ever debt default. However, the imports will be subject to a 50 per cent surcharge on the import duties which is expected to push prices of new imports higher. Dissanayake had earlier announced that 1.2 billion US dollars would be reserved for vehicle imports. *—PTI*

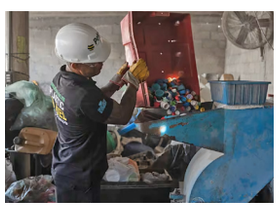


PHOTO: X

Mexican startup converts plastic waste to fuel

BOCA DEL RIO, 1 FEB

A startup in Mexico is trying to help get a handle on one Gulf coast city's plastic waste problem by converting it into gasoline, diesel and other fuels. With less than 10 per cent of the world's plastics being recycled, Petgas' idea is that rather than letting discarded plastic become waste, it can become productive again as fuel. Petgas developed a machine in the port city of Boca del Rio that uses pyrolysis, a thermodynamic process that heats plastics in the absence of oxygen, breaking it down to produce gasoline, diesel, kerosene, paraffin and coke. Petgas Chief Technology Officer Carlos Parraguirre Díaz said that in a week, the machine can process 1.5 tons of plastics and produce 1,350 liters of fuel. *—PTI*

Right-wing to form new govt in Belgium

BRUSSELS, 1 FEB

Political parties in Belgium struck a deal on Friday to form a broad coalition government. The announcement concluded months of talks that followed federal elections in June last year. The country's new prime minister is set to be the right-wing New Flemish Alliance (N-VA) leader Bart De Wever, who secured victory in the June polls. De Wever will lead a five-party coalition which includes the Christian Democrats, the liberal Reformist Movement and the Flemish Social Democrats. Together, they hold an 81-seat majority in Belgium's 150-seat Parliament.
The far-right Vlaams Belang (Flemish Interest) party was excluded from the talks, despite it making the largest gains in the June 2024 election. *—DW News*

Smoke rises as first responders work the scene after a small plane crashed in Philadelphia on Friday **PHOTO: PTI**

6 feared killed in US plane crash

PHILADELPHIA, 1 FEB

A medical transport jet with a child patient, her mother and four others aboard crashed into a Philadelphia neighbourhood shortly after takeoff on Friday evening, exploding in a fireball that engulfed several homes.

The Learjet 55 crashed less than 5km from Northeast Philadelphia Airport.

All six people aboard were from Mexico. The child had been treated in Philadelphia for a life-threatening condition and was being transported home to Mexico, according to Shai Gold, Jet Rescue Air Ambulance spokesperson. The flight's final destination was Tijuana after a stop in Missouri.

Gold said it was a seasoned crew and that everyone involved in these flights goes through rigorous training. "When an incident like this happens, it's shocking and surprising," Gold said. "All of the aircraft are maintained, not a penny is spared because we know our mission is so critical."

Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro said at a news conference late Friday that officials expect fatalities in this "awful" aviation disaster. "We know that there will be loss," he said.

The plane was registered in Mexico. Jet Rescue is based in Mexico and has operations both there and in the US.

The crash came just two days after the deadliest US air disaster in a generation. On Wednesday night, an American Airlines jet carrying 60 passengers and four crew members collided midair with an Army helicopter carrying three soldiers in Washington.

There were no survivors in that crash. *—PTI*

2 hostages return to Israel after handover

KHAN YOUNIS, 1 FEB

Two hostages arrived in Israel after Hamas handed them over to the Red Cross on Saturday, while Palestinian authorities say Israel has agreed to release dozens of prisoners in the fourth round of exchanges during the Gaza ceasefire deal.

The truce, which began on 19 January, is aimed at winding down the deadliest and most destructive war ever fought between Israel and the Hamas militant group. The fragile deal has held for nearly two weeks, halting the fighting and allowing for increased aid to flow into the tiny coastal territory.

The militants released Yarden Bibas, 35, and French-Israeli Ofer Kalderon, 54, to the Red Cross after each climbed on a stage and waved to onlookers. Both Bibas and Kalderon had been abducted during the Hamas-led attack on Israel on 7 October, 2023, that sparked the 15 months of war.

Activists sit on a road with white umbrellas in Tel Aviv during a protest calling for the release of hostages **PHOTO: PTI**

Armed Hamas militants formed a line after chaotic crowds surrounded hostages during a handover Thursday, angering Israel.

Another hostage, American-Israeli Keith Siegel, 65, is also set to be released Saturday and is expected to be handed over to the Red Cross in Gaza City to the north.

A total of 33 Israeli hostages are expected to be freed in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners during the truce's initial six weeks. Israel says it has received information from Hamas that eight of those hostages were either killed in Hamas' 7 October, 2023, attack or have died in captivity

Also on Saturday, wounded Palestinians are expected to be allowed to leave Gaza for Egypt through the Rafah crossing. *—PTI*

18 Pak security men, 23 terrorists killed in restive Balochistan

ISLAMABAD, 1 FEB

- In Harnai district on Saturday, national troops effectively engaged the terrorists, killing 11 militants and destroying multiple terrorist hideouts

At least 18 security personnel and 23 terrorists were killed in clashes between the two sides in Pakistan's troubled southwestern Balochistan province since Friday evening, military officials said on Saturday.

In one such operation in Harnai district on Saturday, troops effectively engaged the terrorists, killing 11 militants and destroying multiple terrorist hideouts.

Earlier on Friday night, 12 terrorists were killed while security forces successfully thwarted militants' attempt to establish roadblocks in the Mangocher area of Kalat.

"Thus far a total of 23 terrorists have been sent to hell in different operations in Balochistan in the last 24 hours," the army said, adding that the operations will continue until perpetrators and facilitators of the heinous and cowardly act are brought to justice.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks. The incident comes less than a day after separate anti-terrorist operations by the security forces in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

At least 10 terrorists in five operations in different areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the ISPR said on Friday.

The operations are part of a sustained effort as the country witnessed a surge in violent attacks since the Taliban returned to power in Afghanistan in 2021. *—PTI*

Taliban have no claim to funds for Afg: US Watchdog

KABUL, 1 FEB

The watchdog for US assistance to Afghanistan said the Taliban have no legal right to billions of dollars in funding set aside for the country because they are not recognised as its government and are under sanctions.

In its latest report issued Friday, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction also said President Donald Trump's administration and Congress may want to examine returning nearly $4 billion earmarked for Afghanistan to the "custody and control" of the US government.

In 2022, the US transferred USD3.5 billion in Afghan central bank assets previously frozen in America to the Swiss-based Fund for the Afghan People. The fund has grown to nearly $4 billion since then, according to the inspector general.

Although no payments benefitting Afghans have been made, the fund is aimed at protecting and stabilising the economy on their behalf.

"The Taliban want these funds even though they have no legal right to them since they are not recognized by the United States as the government of Afghanistan, are on the US Specially Designated Global Terrorist list, and are under US and UN sanctions," the report said.

The report follows Trump's decision to freeze foreign aid for 90 days pending reviews to determine whether they align with his policy goals.

According to the report, the US has spent nearly USD3.71 billion in Afghanistan since withdrawing from the country in 2021.

Most of that has gone to UN agencies. *—PTI*

UGLY FACE OF JUNTA REGIME

No respite in sight as Myanmar civil war rages

BANGKOK, 1 FEB

Peace prospects looked bleak in Myanmar as a civil war rages despite international pressure on the military four years after it seized power from an elected civilian government.

The political situation remains tense with no negotiation space in sight between the military government and the major opposition groups fighting against it.

The four years after the army's takeover on 1 February, 2021, have created a profound situation of multiple, overlapping crises with nearly half the population in poverty and the economy in disarray, the UN Development Programme said.

The UN Human Rights Office said the military ramped up violence against civilians last year to unprecedented levels, inflicting the heaviest civilian death toll since the army takeover as its grip on power eroded.

The four years after the army's takeover on 1 February, 2021, have created a profound situation of multiple, overlapping crises with nearly half the population in poverty **PHOTO: ANI**

The army launched wave after wave of retaliatory airstrikes and artillery shelling on civilians, forced thousands of young people into military service, conducted arbitrary arrests and prosecutions, caused mass displacement and denied access to humanitarians even in the face of natural disasters, the rights office said on Friday.

"After four years, it is deeply distressing to find that the situation on the ground for civilians is only getting worse by the day," UN human rights chief Volker Turk said. "Even as the military's power wanes, their atrocities and violence have expanded in scope and intensity," he said, adding that the retaliatory nature of the attacks were designed to control, intimidate and punish the population.

The US, UK and EU criticised the military takeover and called for the release of ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. *—PTI*

SECTOR-WISE STOCK MOVEMENTS

RAILWAYS: Railway-related stocks saw a significant surge on Saturday. Shares of Titagarh rose by nearly 8%, before settling at Rs 1,085.85, up 6.57%. IRFC shares climbed 3%, peaking at Rs 155.52.

DEFENCE: Defence stocks including Bharat Dynamics, Paras Defence, Mazagon Dock, Astra Microwave, Bharat Electronics, Hindustan Aeronautics, DCX Systems, and MTAR Technologies fell by up to 8%.

AGRICULTURE: Agriculture stocks surged 7%. Kaveri Seed Co. rose 6.99%, Paradeep Phosphates 3.41%, and Bayer CropScience 0.55%.

TEXTILE: Textile stocks surged after announcement of a five-year mission to boost cotton production. Ambika Cotton Mills soared 9.95%, Welspun Living rose 5.19%, Arvind Ltd increased 4.49%, and Alok Industries climbed 4.38%.

REAL ESTATE: Real estate stocks surged up to 9.3% after Finance Minister raised the tax deduction at source (TDS) limit on rent to Rs 6 lakh annually. Prestige Estates rose 9.3%, Sobha increased 4.6%, while Phoenix Mills, DLF, Oberoi Realty, and Godrej Properties gained 1-2%.

PHARMA & HEALTHCARE: Pharma stocks showed mixed movement after exemptions announcement on basic customs duty for 36 essential medicines. Stocks like Sun Pharma, Mankind Pharma, and Biocon rose up to 2%, while Cipla, Dr Reddy's, Zydus Life, and Lupin declined by 1-2%.

TELECOM: Telecom stocks surged up to 10% after Rs 95,298 crore allocation and customs duty cut on Ethernet switches. Bharti Hexacom rose 3.4%, Indus Towers gained 5.5%, HFCL increased 9%, and Vodafone Idea jumped 10%. These stocks benefitted from the boost to India's telecom infrastructure.

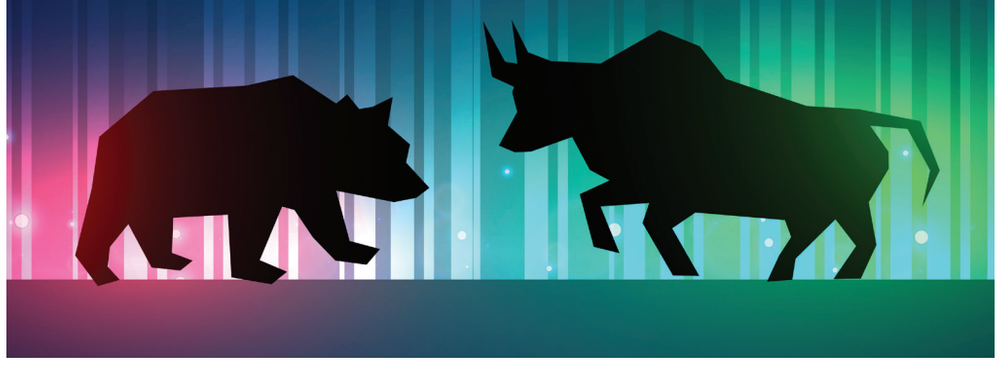
APPAREL & ACCESSORIES: Shares of footwear and leather companies rose after a new policy for the industry. Relaxo Footwear surged 8.8%, Liberty Shoes climbed 7.4%, and Bata India rose 2.8%. Leather stocks like Mirza International soared 16%, and Haryana Leather Chemicals gained 14.7%.

BANKING: Banking stocks fell after Budget raised gross market borrowings by 5.7% to Rs 14.8 lakh crore for FY26. HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, SBI dropped up to 2% as concerns over rising yields and a higher fiscal deficit weighed on investor sentiment.

IT STOCKS: IT stocks specialising in product engineering, digital transformation, and IoT solutions surged 5% after announcing strong Q3 results, reporting a 96% year-on-year profit increase.

UNION BUDGET LEAVES MARKETS VOLATILE

Realty, FMCG soar; capital goods tanked



MUMBAI, 1 FEB

As Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget in the parliament on Saturday, the special session of markets witnessed a volatile day.

Among BSE sectoral indices, realty soared 3.69 per cent, FMCG zoomed 2.91 per cent, consumer discretionary jumped 2.89 per cent and consumer durables rallied 2.47 per cent, while auto and services witnessed a jump of 1.75 per cent and 0.85 per cent, respectively.

Capital Goods tanked 3.02 per cent, even as industrials lost 2.68 per cent, power 2.63 per cent, utilities 2.15 per cent, oil and gas 1.72 per cent and commodities 0.99 per cent.

On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark jumped 1,315.5 points or or 1.72 per cent, and the Nifty went up by 389.95 points or 1.68 per cent.

"The market has responded to the Union budget with a mixed view, primarily due to the modest 10 per cent YoY increase in capex for FY26, falling short of expectations. Sectors like railways, defense, and infra are affected on which the market relies for the performance, dampening the sentiment," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

On the other hand, Nair said, consumption-based sectors, which are expected to benefit the most, had a low effect on the broad market due to their modest market mix position.

"While the Budget failed to cheer the markets, sectoral stocks from consumer durables, FMCG, and automobile space attracted significant buying interest after the government announced major income tax relief for the salaried class. With salaried income up to Rs 12 lakh per annum exempted from any tax, consumption is expected to get a major boost which is reflected positively across most of the consumption-related sectors," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

"Union Budget largely played to our expectations, particularly with the much-needed income tax relief for the middle class, which will drive consumption and economic growth. No changes were made to Securities Transaction or capital gains tax, as anticipated," Pranav Haridasan, MD and CEO, Axis Securities, said. —*PTI*

NSE

GAINERS

- **Avenue Supermarkets:** Rs 4,023.75 359.10 (9.80%)
- **Blue Star:** Rs 2,057 239 (13.20%)
- **Zensar Tech:** Rs 967.75 97.80 (11.20%)
- **Godfrey Philips:** Rs 4,985 467 (10.40%)
- **Radico Khaitan:** Rs 2,380 202 (9.27%)

LOSERS

- **Ircon Intl:** Rs 200.88 -20.56 (-9.29%)
- **RVNL:** Rs 433.55 -42.75 (-8.98%)
- **NCC:** Rs 231.60 -20.71 (-8.21%)
- **JSW Energy:** Rs 472 -36.61 (-7.20%)
- **Railtel Corp:** Rs 378.65 -27.96 (-6.88%)

BSE

GAINERS

- **Zomato:** Rs 236.32 16 (7.25%)
- **Maruti Suzuki:** Rs 12,917 606 (4.93%)
- **ITC:** 462.55 15.10 (3.37%)
- **M&M:** Rs 3,077 86.90 (2.91%)
- **Asian Paints:** Rs 2,351 50.40 (2.19%)

LOSERS

- **Power Grid:** Rs 289.85 -11.80 (-3.92%)
- **L&T:** Rs 3448 -120 (-3.37%)
- **UltraTech Cement:** Rs 11,259 -228 (-1.99%)
- **NTPC:** Rs 317.70 -6.31 (-1.95%)
- **HCL Tech:** Rs 1,694 31.46 (-1.83%)

(DATA AS OF 4PM)

"It is a visionary budget which has stimulated a perfect jugalbandi of robust consumption growth and accelerated investment"
-Anil Agarwal, Vedanta Chairman

"I think that is a very welcome move, which will help consumption and also investment increase into markets"
-Ashish Chauhan, NSE Chief Executive Chairman

"Budget reflects a strong commitment to strengthening India's healthcare ecosystem, with initiatives in medical education, cancer care, and access to medicines"
-Abhay Soi, Max Healthcare Chairman

"Long-term positives are around ease of doing business, the focus on capital goods imports, the inverted duty structure that is being addressed"
-Anish Shah, Mahindra Managing Director and CEO

Nuclear, EVs lead energy mission

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday announced a Rs 20,000-crore nuclear mission and duty exemptions for crucial minerals and capital goods for electric vehicles to step up energy transition.

Boosting nuclear energy at this time is important as it can replace coal as the base load for the power sector in India.

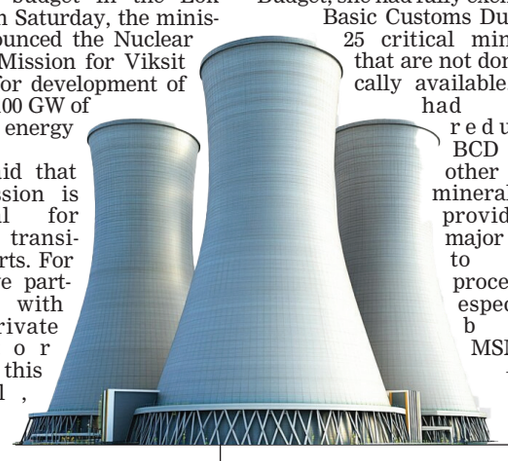
Presenting her eighth straight budget in the Lok Sabha on Saturday, the minister announced the Nuclear Energy Mission for Viksit Bharat for development of at least 100 GW of nuclear energy by 2047.

She said that the mission is essential for energy transition efforts. For an active partnership with the private sector towards this goal, amendments to the Atomic Energy Act and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act will be taken up, she informed the House.

A Nuclear Energy Mission for research & development of Small Modular Reactors (SMR) with an outlay of Rs 20,000 crore will be set up.

At least five indigenously developed SMRs will be operationalized by 2033.

About the critical minerals, Sitharman said in the July 2024 Budget, she had fully exempted Basic Customs Duty on 25 critical minerals that are not domestically available. She had also reduced BCD of 2 other such minerals to provide a major fillip to their processing especially by MSMEs. —*PTI*



Builders applaud Rs 15,000 crore fund for stalled projects

Leading real estate bodies CREDAI and NAREDCO are urging the government for more robust measures in the Union Budget, especially regarding home loan interest exemptions and support for affordable housing. While both associations acknowledged the establishment of a Rs 15,000 crore fund to complete stalled housing projects, they expressed disappointment over the lack of further incentives. CREDAI's National President, Boman Irani, noted that raising the TDS threshold on rent and exempting income up to Rs 12 lakh would boost housing demand. NAREDCO's G Hari Babu echoed this sentiment, highlighting the urgent need to redefine affordable housing criteria. Both emphasised that enhanced measures could significantly improve market stability and accessibility for middle-class homeowners, currently grappling with rising loan interest rates and rental pressures. —*PTI*

'Revamped UDAN scheme to boost air travel'

Airlines have expressed enthusiasm over the proposal to enhance the UDAN (Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik) scheme, which aims to improve regional air connectivity to 120 new destinations. In her Union Budget speech for the financial year 2025-26, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman noted the scheme's success in providing air travel opportunities to 1.5 crore middle-class citizens. —*PTI*

Commercial LPG down by ₹7, ATF up

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

The price of Jet fuel, or ATF, on Saturday was hiked by a steep 5.6 per cent while the rate of commercial LPG that is used in hotels and restaurants was cut by Rs 7 per 19-kg cylinder in the monthly revision done in line with the benchmark international prices.

The aviation turbine fuel (ATF) price was increased by Rs 5,078.25 per kilolitre, or 5.6 per cent, to Rs 95,533.72 per kl in the national capital - home to one of the busiest airports in the country, according to state-owned fuel retailers.

The hike follows a reduction in rates by 1.5 per cent in the previous revision on 1 January.

Prior to that, prices were increased twice - Rs 2,941.5 per kl (3.3 per cent) on 1 November, and by Rs 1,318.12 per kl (1.45 per cent) on December 1, 2024.

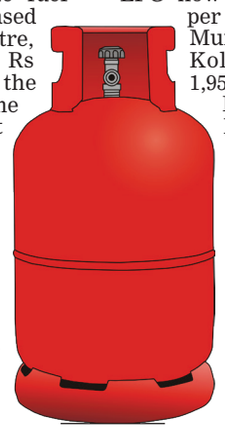
Oil firms also reduced the price of commercial LPG by Rs 7 to Rs 1,797 per 19-kg cylinder in the national capital.

In five price hikes prior to the two rounds of cuts this year, commercial LPG rate had been hiked by Rs 172.5 per 19-kg cylinder.

LPG now costs Rs 1,749.50 per 19-kg cylinder in Mumbai, Rs 1,907 in Kolkata and Rs 1,959.50 in Chennai.

Prices of ATF and LPG differ from state to state depending on the incidence of local taxes including VAT.

Prices of petrol and diesel continue to remain frozen. Rates had been cut by Rs 2 per litre in mid-March ahead of elections. —*PTI*



DGCA imposes ₹30 lakh penalty on Air India

MUMBAI, 1 FEB

Aviation safety regulator DGCA has imposed a penalty of Rs 30 lakh on Tata Group-owned Air India for allegedly allowing one of its pilots to operate a flight without complying with certain regulatory requirements. The DGCA in order of 29 January also said that it has found "recurrent rostering issues...," about the airline. The order to slap penalty came after the response of a show-cause notice to Air India's head of operations and head of rostering, among other executives, on 13 December, 2024 was found "unsatisfactory." The pilot "operated a flight on 7July despite not having the mandatory recency requirement of 3 take off and landingst," the regulator said. —*PTI*

100 SCRIBES AFFECTED

Israel's Paragon spyware targets WhatsApp in 24 countries

CALIFORNIA, 1 FEB

WhatsApp has revealed that nearly 100 journalists and members of civil society using the messaging app were targeted by spyware linked to Israeli company Paragon Solutions. The spyware, known as Graphite, was allegedly used to breach the security of the devices without the users needing to click any links. The app sent notifications to users warning of potential device breaches and confirmed that the affected users were compromised.

The attack appears to have been a "zero-click" hack, meaning no interaction from the victims was required to activate the spyware. WhatsApp has not disclosed the locations of the affected individuals but stated it was not clear which governments commissioned the attacks. Paragon's spyware is known for its ability to access encrypted messages, similar to NSO Group's Pegasus software.

PHOTO:FREEPIK

The company said it had sent a cease-and-desist letter to Paragon Solutions and was exploring legal actions. WhatsApp claims the attack was disrupted in December, but it remains unclear for how long the targets were under threat. Victims of the breach are being directly notified.

Paragon Solutions, which has faced scrutiny in the past for contracts with the US government, declined to comment on the allegations. WhatsApp's announcement follows a major legal victory over NSO Group, which was found liable for hacking WhatsApp. —*Salar News*

Gold remains flat at ₹84,900 per 10 g; silver rallies ₹700

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Gold remained flat at its all-time high price of Rs 84,900 per 10 grams in the national capital on Saturday, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

On Friday, the precious metal price of 99.9 per cent purity rose for the third straight session, jumping by Rs 1,100 to hit a new peak of Rs 84,900 per 10 grams driven by robust domestic demand.

Gold has rallied by Rs 5,510 or 7 per cent since January 1 when the metal traded at Rs 79,390 per 10 grams in the local market.

The yellow metal of 99.5 per purity also traded flat at Rs 84,500 per 10 grams -- also its record high on Saturday.

However, silver rallied for the fourth straight session, climbing Rs 700 to Rs 95,700 per kg on persistent offtake by industrial units and coin makers.

The white metal had closed at Rs 95,000 per kg on Friday.

In the last four sessions, silver has advanced Rs 2,700 or 2.9 per cent to Rs 95,700 per kg from Rs 93,000 per kg on 29 January.

Meanwhile, the precious metal metal found no mention in Union Budget 2025-26, leaving the traders assessing its potential impact on prices and investor sentiment. —*PTI*

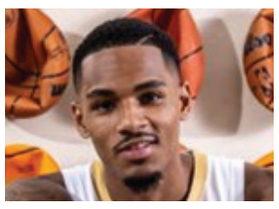


PHOTO: X

NBA: Pelicans' Murray ruled out for season

NEW ORLEANS, 1 FEB

New Orleans Pelicans have been handed yet another setback after Dejounte Murray exited the game during the first quarter in the 118-116 loss to the Boston Celtics at the Smoothie King Center. According to a report by ESPN, Murray suffered a torn Achilles tendon which will rule him out for the remainder of the 2024-25 NBA season. Murray chased the ball after missing a jumper but to the floor before limping off the court. "Extremely difficult, when you see a guy that means so much to our team and puts the work in to go down like that. Those are the challenges we've been going through pretty much all season," Pelicans coach Willie Green said after the game.—*PTI*

Sepp Straka leads by 3 at Pebble Beach Pro-Am

PEBBLE BEACH, 1 FEB

Sepp Straka got most of his work done before the weather started to turn Friday in the AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am, posting another 7-under 65 for a three-shot lead that left Rory McIlroy, Scottie Scheffler and everyone having to chase him. Straka, coming off a win two weeks ago in the California desert, showed a game that works fine at sea level in less-than-ideal conditions, particularly the final hour. Out came the mittens and beanies. Down came the temperature, accompanied by a little rain.—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Kim leads by 3 strokes at LPGA season opener

ORLANDO, 1 FEB

A Lim Kim made enough birdies in an up-and-down second round to maintain a cushion between herself and top-ranked Nelly Korda on Friday at the Hilton Grand Vacations Tournament of Champions, the LGPA Tour season opener. Kim shot 69 at Lake Nona for a two-day total of 10-under 134, making six birdies and three bogeys after her bogey-free opening round. That was good for a three-shot lead over Linn Grant (67) and four shots better than Korda, who was even par for the tournament through her first 22 holes but shot 6 under from there for a 67. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Yuvraj to represent India Masters in International ML

MUMBAI, 1 FEB

Two-time World Cup-winner Yuvraj Singh, one of cricket's greatest left-handers, will represent India Masters in season one of the International Masters League (IML), which will be played from 22 February to 16 March this year. A name synonymous with glory and game-changing moments, Yuvraj was one of the chief architects of India's victory in the inaugural ICC T20 World Cup in 2007, during which he famously smashed England pacer Stuart Broad for six sixes in an over.He also played a pivotal role in India's ICC ODI World Cup win in 2011, where he was crowned Player of the Tournament for his outstanding all-round performance.—*PTI*

Sports budget raised by over ₹350 crore

Khelo India gets biggest share

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

The government's flagship Khelo India programme to scout and nurture athletes at the grassroots level was the biggest beneficiary as the allocation for sports was hiked substantially by Rs 351.98 crore in the Union Budget presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman here on Saturday.

The ambitious scheme has been allocated Rs 1,000 crore for the financial year 2025-26. This is Rs 200 crore more than the grant of Rs 800 crore in 2024-25. Overall, the Ministry for Youth Affairs and Sports was designated Rs 3,794.30 crore, an overall jump of Rs 351.98 crore.

The increase is substantial considering there are no major sporting events like the Olympics, Commonwealth, or Asian Games lined up in the next year.

The assigned amount for assistance to National Sports Federations has also been hiked marginally from Rs 340 crore to Rs 400 crore. India is currently pushing through with an ambitious bid to host the 2036 Olympic Games for which a letter of intent has been submitted to the International Olympic Committee. —*PTI*

National Sports Federations has also been hiked marginally from Rs 340 crore to Rs 400 crore PHOTO: PTI

PLANS • ALLOCATION • EXPENDITURE UNION BUDGET 2025

AUSTRALIA HANDS SL ITS BIGGEST LOSS IN TEST CRICKET

GALLE, 1 FEB

Australia wrapped up the first test against Sri Lanka with a session and a day to spare, handing the hosts their biggest defeat in test cricket on Saturday.

Sri Lanka were skittled out for 247 in their second innings, succumbing to an innings-and-242-run drubbing. Their previous heaviest test defeat was an innings-and-239-run loss to India in Nagpur in 2017.

Spinners Matthew Kuhnemann and Nathan Lyon ran riot, sharing 16 wickets between them as they dismantled Sri Lanka's fragile batting lineup in both innings.

Kuhnemann, who had already snared a five-wicket haul in the first innings, finished with figures of nine for 149 — his best in test cricket.

Sri Lanka's resistance was feeble at best. They lost eight wickets in a session before lunch and another seven between lunch and tea, as Australia stamped their authority with smart bowling and exceptional fielding.

Australia 654 for 6 dec beat Sri Lanka 165 and 247 (Vandersay 53*, Mathews 41, Lyon 4-78, Kuhnemann 4-86) by an innings and 242 runs —*PTI*

Matthew Kuhnemann finished with nine wickets

RANJI TROPHY

Delhi dominates Railways with an innings victory

MUMBAI, 2 FEB

Off-spinner Shivam Sharma grabbed five wickets as Delhi ended their Ranji Trophy league campaign on a high, sealing a bonus point win over Railways here on Saturday.

Resuming the day at 334 for seven, Delhi ended up with 374 all out in the first session to take a 133-run lead. It also denied the crowd a chance to see batting icon Virat Kohli in action for a second time in this match.For Delhi, Sumit Mathur (86), who was batting on 78 overnight, could not reach the three-figure mark as Kohli's conqueror on day two, Himanshu Sangwan, ended with four wickets.

The spectators were robbed of the opportunity to see Kohli in the second innings as Railways batters self-destructed on a slow and low surface. Brief scores: Delhi 374 in 106.4 overs beat Railways 241 and 114 all out in 30.5 overs (Mohammed Said 31; Shivam Sharma 5/33) by innings and 19 runs.

Security personnel and ground staff are seen among players of Delhi and Railways amid a security breach after 3 Virat Kohli fans barged into the field on the third day of Ranji Trophy match PHOTO: PTI

Mumbai crush Meghalaya by innings and 456 runs

Shardul Thakur and Tanush Kotian

grabbed four wickets each as rampant Mumbai stormed to an innings and 456-run win over Meghalaya to top the Ranji Trophy Elite Group A table here on Saturday.

Mumbai currently has 29 points, similar to Jammu & Kashmir but the defending champions are ahead by a Net Run Rate of 1.74 as against the latter's 1.59.

While the victory was Mumbai's largest in terms of an innings in the Ranji Trophy history, it also bolstered their chances of reaching the quarterfinal which will start on February 8.

Brief scores: Meghalaya 86 and 129 in 30.1 overs (Kishan Lyndoh 39, Anirudh B 24; Shardul Thakur 4/48, Tanush Kotian 4/15) lost to Mumbai 671/7 decl. by an innings and 456 runs.

Karnataka trails Haryana

Haryana's strong innings put Karnataka's quarterfinal hopes at risk as they seek to recover.

The Karnataka Cricket Team faced a significant challenge on 1 February, 2025, as they competed against Haryana in the Ranji Trophy, needing to secure a victory to advance to the quarterfinals. After day three of the match at the M. Chinnaswamy Stadium, Bengaluru, Karnataka found themselves trailing by 38 runs, with their performance under scrutiny.

Currently, Karnataka stands at 108 runs for the loss of three wickets after 32 overs, significantly behind Haryana, who had posted 450 all out. —*PTI*

Gujarat seals QF spot

Strong 50s from Aarya Desai and Jaymeet Patel along with a disciplined bowling performance led by spinner Desai powered Gujarat to a dominant nine-wicket victory over Himachal Pradesh in their final Ranji Trophy Elite Group B match here on Saturday, securing their place in the quarterfinals.Desai claimed four wickets, while his spin colleague Vishal took three and Jaymeet added two with his left-arm medium pace, as Gujarat dismissed HP for 175 in 62.5 overs after beginning the third day at 63 for 2. Himachal Pradesh 215 & 175 all out in 62.5 overs (Chopra 61; Desai 4/44, Vishal 3/56) lost to Gujarat 247 & 145 for 1 in 22.3 overs (Patel 51 not out, Desai 69 not out; Bedi 1/46) by nine wkts —*PTI*

DAVIS CUP: INDIA LEAD TOGO 2-0

Mukund plays a forehand return against Togo

Mukund and Ramkumar walk away with easy wins

NEW DELHI, 1 FEB

Sasikumar Mukund returned to Davis Cup action with a fluent straight-set victory while Ramkumar Ramanathan hardly broke a sweat in his match as an untroubled India took a 2-0 lead in the World Group I play-off tie against Togo, here Saturday.

Togo had promised a tough fight in the build-up, even warning the Indian skipper to not take them for granted but their performance belied the exceptional results they had enjoyed coming into this match.

There was not even a semblance of resistance from the players of the African nation, making it a pretty dull contest, watched by about 1500 fans.

The opening match of the tie went on expected lines with Liova Ayite Ajavon, languishing outside the top 1000, lacking ammunition to test the 365th-ranked Mukund in his home conditions.

The 28-year-old Indian needed just one hour and 15 minutes to walk away with a 6-2 6-1 win in the opening singles at the DLTA Complex.

Ramkumar then overpowered Togo number one Thomas Setodji 6-0 6-2 in the second singles which got over in just 50 minutes. A good fight was expected from Setodji but it turned out to be another lop-sided affair.

It seemed that Setodji ranked 1256, was not at his best as he struggled to put the ball across the net.

With his right arm taped above and below the elbow, Setodji's returns lacked sting as he made a high number of unforced errors. —*PTI*

38TH NATIONAL GAMES

Babuta & Thakur clinch 10m air rifle mixed team gold

DEHRADUN, 1 FEB

Punjab duo of Arjun Babuta and Ojasvi Thakur showcased precision and composure to clinch the 10m air rifle mixed team gold medal on Day 4 of shooting competitions at the 38th National Games here on Saturday.

Arjun and Ojasvi beat Maharashtra's Arya Borse and Rudrankksh Patil 16-12 in an intense gold medal match at the Trishool Shooting Range here.

There was nothing much to separate the two pairs for most of the contest before the Punjab duo sealed the win with a final shot score of 21.4 against Maharashtra's 21.0.

In the bronze medal match, West Bengal's Abhinav Shaw and Ismita Bhowal put up an impressive performance to defeat Gujarat by 17-11. Their final shot score of 21.1 proved superior to Gujarat's 20.4, earning them a place on the podium.

PHOTO: PTI

"It feels amazing to win gold for our state, and of course, it was a true team effort," said the 16-year-old Ojasvi, expressing joy after the gold medal win.

"While on the shooting range and aiming for gold, we both focused on our performances, striving to achieve the maximum points," said the 26-year-old Babuta, who won 10m air rifle individual event as well as team gold in the 2022 Changwon World Cup and also a yellow metal in the team event in the 2023 Asian Championships.

Earlier, the qualification round saw the participation of 25 teams from across India, with the top four advancing to the final. Punjab led the qualification standings with a score of 631.7, followed by Maharashtra (630.7), West Bengal (630.6) and Gujarat (629.4). —*PTI*

Maharashtra claims Kho-Kho gold medals

HALDWANI, 1 FEB

Maharashtra capped their dominating performance in the kho kho event at the 38th National Games by claiming both the men's and women's gold medals here on Saturday. Odisha also secured the silver medal in both the men's and women's tournaments. In the men's final, Maharashtra defeated Odisha 32-26, while their women counterparts triumphed over Odisha 31-28. The bronze medal match in the men's category witnessed a fierce battle between West Bengal and Kerala. As both teams finished the game simultaneously, the match went into sudden death, resulting in both teams being jointly awarded the bronze medal.The women's third-place match between Delhi and Karnataka also extended to sudden death, and ultimately, both teams were jointly awarded the bronze medal. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

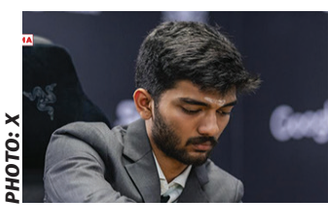


PHOTO: X

Gukesh draws with Wei Yi, Praggu outwits Caruana

WIJK AAN ZEE, 1 FEB

World champion D Gukesh maintained his half-point lead with an easy draw against Wei Yi of China, while R Praggnanandhaa outwitted top seed Fabiano Caruana of the United States to come within striking distance of the leader after the 11th round of Tata Steel Masters here.

Playing the white side of an Italian game, Gukesh went for a relatively new plan by pushing his central pawn in the opening helped Wei Yi maintain parity after the trade of queens.

The Indian was up a pawn when the endgame surfaced but the position was level and the peace was signed in 30 moves.

The draw helped Gukesh jump to eight points out of a possible 11 in the first major tournament of the year, while Praggnanandhaa stunned Caruana with black pieces to move to 7.5 points. , who played out a draw with German Vincent Keymer. —*PTI*

NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

Mohan wins trophy in his first Formula Race

CHENNAI, 1 FEB

Bengaluru teenager Abhay Mohan, who won one of the two premier single-seater National Championships in the prestigious MRF MMSC FMSCI Indian National Car Racing Championships in 2024, won his first National Championship Trophy at a glittering awards ceremony here.

The 16-year-old 2022 Junior National Karting champion dominated the track in his very first year after graduating into single-seater racing this year and notched up 10 race wins from 12 races in the MRF 1600cc National Championship.

With a combination of brute speed and admirable race craft, he displayed his authority in abundance to take an all-win record till the penultimate race of the last round.

He was miles ahead in his races and dished out victory after victory, with huge leads for 10 consecutive races before he stumbled out in the final round. But by that time, he comfortably clinched the race with an unbeatable lead in the championship. "The atmosphere is wonderful and I am elated. This is my first big championship in single-seater Formula cars and what an amazing season it was. Though I won the National title in karting, this is huge and very special for me," said a delighted Mohan at the prize-giving event held here on Friday. He is looking for bigger things in 2025 but vows to put in the same hard work and dedication in pursuit of his future goals. —*PTI*

Abhay Mohan, 16-year-old racer from Bengaluru PHOTO: PTI

Saha retires from all forms of cricket

KOLKATA, 1 FEB

India wicketkeeper-batter Wriddhiman Saha retired from all forms of cricket on Saturday, bringing down the curtains on an illustrious career after playing his final Ranji Trophy group-stage match for Bengal against Punjab at the iconic Eden Gardens here.

The 40-year-old Saha, who made his international debut in February 2010, has played 49 matches for India across formats -- 40 Tests and nine ODIs. He also represented Bengal and Tripura in domestic cricket, featuring in 142 First-Class and 116 List-A matches.

"It has been 28 years since I first stepped onto a cricket field in 1997, and what a journey it has been! Representing my country, state, district, clubs, university, college, and school has been the greatest honor of my life," Saha said in an emotional post in 'X'.

Reflecting on the impact of cricket on his life, Saha said, "Everything I am today, every achievement —*PTI*